

GEOGRAPHIES OF THE MIND: NARRATIVE SPACES AND LITERARY LANDSCAPES
IN WILLIAM GILMORE SIMMS'S ANTEBELLUM FICTION

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ABSTRACT

Kathleen Crosby: *Geographies of the Mind: Narrative Spaces and Literary Landscapes in William Gilmore Simms's Antebellum Fiction*
(Under the direction of Philip F. Gura)

Genre affords a theoretical and conceptual framework for knowledge production and knowledge distribution. Rhetorically, genre affords a political, artistic, and ideological tool that enables a rhetor to respond to personal and cultural anxieties. *Geographies of the Mind: Narrative Spaces and Literary Landscapes in William Gilmore Simms's Antebellum Fiction* examines ten of nineteenth-century American author William Gilmore Simms's works, including three manuscript-only ones. Drawing upon rhetorical theory and narrative theory, this project uncovers the breadth of Simms's rhetorical and literary practices within the confession narrative, the ghost story, the pirate romance, and the sentimental novel. I demonstrate that Simms's texts both adhere to and subvert the boundaries of generic conventions and, in doing so, elucidate legal, psychological, and transnational concerns of the time. By focusing on the narrative spaces of Simms's texts, I prove that Simms's geographic spaces reverberate with hauntings that serve to mark moments of intellectual, personal, and historical disconnect, thereby voicing the disjunctive nature of antebellum southern spaces. By connecting rhetorical theory with literary and spatial considerations, this project offers a detailed analysis of Simms's work, positing that narrative practices are dynamic and responsive spaces, ones that are reflective of and responsive to the geographies of the mind.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: SPATIAL AND TEXTUAL GEOGRAPHIES.....	1
CHAPTER 2: IN THE SHADOWS OF THE MIND: SIMMS'S USE OF THE CONFESSION GENRE.....	12
CHAPTER 3: IN THE SHADOW OF ONE'S DREAMS: SIMMS AND THE GHOST STORY.....	46
CHAPTER 4: IN THE SHADOW OF THE SHORE: THE SEASCAPES AND LANDSCAPES OF SIMMS'S PIRATE ROMANCE.....	85
CHAPTER 5: IN THE SHADOW OF THE LAW: SIMMS'S SENTIMENTAL NOVEL AND THE LAW.....	117
WORKS CITED.....	154

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: SPATIAL AND TEXTUAL GEOGRAPHIES

On the evening of June 17, 2015, a twenty-one-year-old white man entered the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina and sat alongside thirteen members of the congregation who had gathered there at that Wednesday evening for a Bible prayer group. At the end of the meeting, the man stood and opened fire, injuring one church member and killing nine. While the city of Charleston and the nation mourned yet another senseless mass shooting, the suspect, now in police custody, spoke to his desire to start a race war and social media flurried with pictures of the accused surrounded by emblems of white supremacy and images of the Confederate flag.

A maelstrom followed, ricocheting through our national consciousness and catalyzing a national discussion on the place of southern history and, particularly, Confederate history in 2015. Legislators called for the removal of the Confederate flag from the South Carolina State House, mass market retailers called for the removal of Confederate-branded items from their shelves, and college campuses and southern downtowns would find themselves called upon to remove statues that evoked Confederate memory.¹ The pull of Confederate memory runs deep, is deeply rooted in cultural landscapes and cultural memories, and is enacted and felt deeply in innately personal, affective ways. We remember; we romanticize; we mourn; we hurt. Southern

¹ The South Carolina legislature would vote to remove the flag on July 9, 2015; the flag was removed on July 10, 2015. Walmart, Kmart, Amazon.com, and others announced they would stop selling items with the Confederate flag as of June 23, 2015. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Texas at Austin, among others, would each hear calls for the removal of monuments that spoke to Confederate history.

history, or, dare we say, American history, is intricate—and nettled; ugly—and beautiful; raw—and alive. The question, always, is what do we do with this nettled—and often ugly—past?

While we can seemingly remove the past from sight and pretend it never existed; sweep it from our downtown areas, mass retailers' shelves, and college campuses; and hope upon hope that we have excised it, the fact that four homes on the one-lane road I drive into my small rural town—population 1,650—now proudly display their Confederate flags offers a different narrative.

Maybe one cannot so easily eliminate the past.

If we were literary scholars and turned to our bookshelves for answers, even just a quick survey of our literary history would also suggest the inability of ever doing so. William Faulkner reminds us: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past” (73); Toni Morrison chronicles: “Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think if, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened” (36); and F. Scott Fitzgerald ever so expertly cautions us: “And so we beat on, boats against the currents, borne back ceaselessly into the past” (189).

The study of southern literature is one rife with discussions of place, of race, of ownership, of the meaning of the South and its heritage and history in the twenty-first century. Yet, the summer of 2015 reminds us that our pedagogical discussions of purpose, methodology, and scholarship cannot and should not be divorced from the world in which we live. An excavation of southern spaces is equally an excavation of national spaces, and southern

literature, history, culture, and more afford us the opportunity to think critically about the spaces, institutional and cultural, that we exist in now across this nation.

At the core, this is a project about the American narrative and the ways in which its literature reveals who we are, what we value, what has discomfited us, and what haunts us still. Specifically, it looks to southern antebellum author William Gilmore Simms (1806–1870), a South Carolina writer, editor, attorney, and legislator, who himself experienced an erasure from cultural memory and literary history following the end of the Civil War. While critical attention has been paid to the long-form fictional works of Simms, particularly his historical romances, this project takes under consideration Simms's less-studied works, particularly those written in the early part of his career. An avid reader and writer, Simms wrote juvenilia poetry, short stories, novels, nonfiction, orations, and literary criticisms, and the breadth of his writing crosses historical time periods, national boundaries, and generic conventions. From ghost stories to devil stories, from border romances to experimental drama, Simms's oeuvre incorporates almost every genre found in nineteenth-century American writings, and little attention has been paid to the ways in which Simms deploys genre as a rhetorical tool. This project seeks to do that.

In *Geographies of the Mind: Narrative Spaces and Literary Landscapes in William Gilmore Simms's Antebellum Fiction*, I consider ten of Simms's texts, including three that are manuscript only. In particular, I examine the confession narrative, the ghost story, the pirate tale, and the sentimental/seduction novel. As I show, William Gilmore Simms's texts serve to define and subvert the boundaries of generic conventions, revealing legal, psychological, and transnational concerns of the time. Additionally, Simms's texts reveal his own capacious mind: one firmly and equally committed to the southern cause and to nineteenth-century discourses on literature, law, science, spiritualism, selfhood, psychology, and history. Drawing upon rhetorical

theory and narrative theory, this project uncovers the breadth of Simms's rhetorical and literary practices within texts that have been marginalized since the nineteenth century. In this project, I advance two key arguments: first that within these texts, spatial representations embody cultural memory and, particularly, southern memory and, second, that rhetorical and narrative spaces are the primary way by which Simms articulates the life of the mind in antebellum America.

Simms's early southern landscapes reverberate with hauntings, establishing the South as a site haunted by its past, a reality ever-so-present one hundred and fifty years past the end of Simms's life. Yet equally, Simms's texts suggest that those hauntings go beyond the literal and the literary and serve to mark moments of intellectual, personal, and historical disconnect, thereby articulating the disjunctive nature of antebellum southern spaces. As such, a reconsideration of Simms's works affords the opportunity to reexamine the role of genre in nineteenth century literary studies as well as the intersection of literary and intellectual spaces in nineteenth-century southern literature.

To substantiate these arguments, each of the following four chapters takes up a particular literary genre, considering the rhetorical strategies of the genre and the literary landscapes of a given text(s). Chapter two, "In the Shadows of the Mind: Simms's Use of the Confession Genre," examines Simms's deployment of the confession narrative, a genre rooted in autobiographical and forensic discourse. Simms's novel posits that storytelling is an act of negotiation and that narrative is the primary means by which the self is actualized and performed. Chapter three, "In the Shadow of One's Dreams: Simms and the Ghost Story," considers Simms's use of the ghost story in his 1844 novel *Castle Dismal*. Simms's ghost story establishes the southern plantation as a space marked by individual and national anxieties. The second half of the chapter turns to the novel's unpublished preface, arguing that when examined

in tandem, the novel and the preface subvert generic and stylistic conventions of the time.

Chapter four, “In the Shadow of the Shore: The Seascapes and Landscapes of Simms’s Pirate Romance,” analyzes how Simms utilized the pirate tale to craft an explicitly southern story that simultaneously recognizes the complex ideological, national, and transnational networks of the early national and antebellum periods. Chapter five, “In the Shadow of the Law: Simms’s Sentimental Novel and the Law,” traces Simms’s use of legal and historical discourses in his sentimental novels of the Kentucky tragedy, thereby establishing the genre of the sentimental as one realized at the intersection of the romantic and the legal. By considering these four genres and their literary, historical, and rhetorical purposes, this project furthers our understanding of William Gilmore Simms, antebellum literary practices, and southern literary history. By connecting rhetorical theory with literary and spatial considerations, this project offers a detailed analysis of Simms’s work, positing that narrative practices are dynamic and responsive spaces, ones that are reflective of and responsive to the geographies of the mind.

William Gilmore Simms

Born in Charleston, South Carolina on April 17, 1806, Simms was raised by his maternal grandmother, following the death of his mother Harriet Ann Augusta Singleton Simms in 1808.² Following his wife’s death, Simms’s father, William Simms, deserted Charleston and his family for better fortune, first, in Tennessee and later in Mississippi. Known for her own ability to spin

² To date, the definitive biography of William Gilmore Simms is John Caldwell Guilds’s *Simms: A Literary Life* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1992). In 1892, William P. Trent published the biography *William Gilmore Simms* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1892). Trent’s account is generally viewed as biased and inflammatory. As Louis D. Rubin writes in *The Edge of the Swamp: A Study in the Literature and Society of the Old South*, “Trent’s thesis was that Simms was a victim of the slaveholding South’s undemocratic values and its belief in class distinctions . . . His [Trent’s] biography was an early manifestation of the progressivist attitude common among early twentieth-century Southern liberals, and in part a defensive response to indictments of Southern backwardness and racial intolerance by outsiders” (56). John McCardell, historian and current vice-chancellor at Sewanee The University of the South, was at one time at work on a new biography but has said he is no longer. The Simms Society has voiced the need for a new biography on Simms given the increase in resources made available by the South Caroliniana Library and the Simms Initiative at the University of South Carolina as well as the increased understanding of the intellectual and literary life of nineteenth-century America.

a yarn, Simms's grandmother "was a superstitious yet bookish person steeped in experience, history, literature, and the supernatural; she fascinated her precocious grandson and sparked his interest in the glories of South Carolina, medieval France and Spain, and ghost of all kinds" (Guilds 7). As a child, he was recounted the stories of "The Pilgrim's Progress" and "The Vicar of Wakefield" (Guilds 7), and he wrote juvenilia poetry by the age of eight. At the age of ten, Simms was given the choice to go and live with his father or remain with his grandmother in Charleston. The boy chose the latter. For many scholars, this initial choice is the psychological root for Simms's depiction of Charleston, the locale marking "a certain ambivalence [that] was the root of this traumatic boyhood decision: ambivalence toward his father and, perhaps most of all, ambivalence toward Charleston—a love-hate dichotomy that lasted a lifetime" (Guilds 10). At the age of eighteen, Simms would travel a one-thousand mile journey to his father's plantation, traveling from coastal South Carolina down to Milledgeville, Georgia, across to Montgomery, Alabama, down to Mobile, Alabama, and then north to Tuscaloosa, Alabama and then west to Georgeville, Mississippi. It is these early travels as well as his extended time in the southwest that would be written into his border romances and other frontier stories.

Upon his return to Charleston, Simms studied under Charles River Carroll, a practitioner of the law, and later that same year, the nineteen-year-old Simms would become one of the editors of the *Album*, "a weekly Literary Miscellany" (Guilds 19). The next years of Simms's life saw him balancing his life of law and his life of literature. When the *Album* folded, Simms would become editor of the *Southern Literary Gazette*, and a series of southern periodical editorships would follow throughout Simms's career.³ By 1833, Simms would begin to see

³ The periodicals Simms edited include the *Album* (1825), the *Southern Literary Gazette* (1828–1829), the *City Gazette* (1830–1832), the *Cosmopolitan* (1833), the *Magnolia* (1842), *Southern and Western Monthly Magazine and Reviews* (1845), *Southern Quarterly Review* (1849–1855), the *Daily South Carolinian* (1865–1866), and the *Columbia Phoenix* (1865).

national recognition for his writing, having published six novels by that time. His novel *Martin Faber* was widely reviewed; an early review in the *New York American* asserts, “we do not hesitate to say, that since Godwin carried that singular and impressive style, first introduced in modern fiction by our countryman Charles Brockden Brown, to such perfection in *Caleb Williams*, no work of that school has come under our notice which shows more power than the little tale before us . . . we express our unfeigned wish to hear soon again from the author of *Martin Faber*” (qtd. in Guilds 44).

The wish of Charles Fenno Hoffman’s review would come true. Over the course of his life, Simms would publish over eighty novels and short stories, innumerable poems and letters, and countless political orations and literature reviews. As David Moltke-Hansen has stated, “no mid-nineteenth-century writer and editor did more than William Gilmore Simms to frame white southern self-identity and nationalism, shape southern historical consciousness, or foster the South’s literary life and place in America’s culture” (3). David S. Shields writes, “Simms embraced letters as his calling, using both poetry and prose to project a vision national in ambition and sectional in cast. He believed his civic enterprise to be mythopoetic, requiring the creation of epics of nation formation and georgics of southern planter civilization” (x).

The end of the Civil War would find Simms in a ravaged Charleston; his own plantation, including its renowned library, burned in the northern retreat; his second wife dead; he himself seriously ill; and his literary reputation shattered. For a man who had tied his voice so intimately to the southern cause, the defeat of the Confederacy found him defeated. Yet as archival recovery has revealed, Simms continued to write between 1865 and his death in 1870, and as David S. Shields so eloquently writes in reference to Simms, “Before the war he was the most articulate advocate of southern nationalism; during the war he was a prophetic critic of

Confederate policy and poet of cultural ethno-genesis; after the war he was both an elegist and a promoter of new possibilities of public purpose and social beauty. In no other writer from the southern side does one encounter so wide a range of sense of the meaning of the war or such a deeply expressed play of moods about its conduct and aftermath” (ix).

In *Apples and Ashes: Literature, Nationalism, and the Confederate States of America*, Coleman Hutchison acknowledges that “for nearly 150 years there has seemingly been a critical consensus that Confederate imaginative literature is not worthy of extensive consideration” (1). The same has, to some extent, been true for William Gilmore Simms, particularly in broader literary contexts. This is not to say that this project argues for a reinstatement of Confederate memory, only that the reading of southern antebellum and Confederate literature allows one, to appropriate Hutchison’s words, “to trace the development of national literature both in process and in miniature” (3). To look to Simms’s texts in all of their complexities affords a broader understanding of the intricacies of nineteenth-century literature.

Genre Theory

Methodologically, this project examines Simms’s work under the lens of genre study. In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrup Frye notes that “generic distinctions are among the ways in which literary works are *ideally* presented, whatever the actualities may be” (247). Genre affords a theoretical and conceptual framework for knowledge production and knowledge distribution. At the most basic level, genre provides boundaries, allowing readers to see how the characteristics of one text dovetail with the typologies of others. For literary scholars, this foregrounds the most basic practices of textual analysis. Additionally, genre conventions hold import for human cognition. As Kathleen M. Hall Jamieson has averred, “When a critic compares a contemporary critical object to great specimens of that type, he is merely formulating

a natural process...[in fact,] the human need for a frame of reference lures the mind to generic classification” (167). Epistemologically, humans identify with an object or a text based on prior knowledge, recognizing and classifying the new based on knowledge-making frameworks that have been previously internalized.⁴ “Genres help frame the boundaries and meanings of utterances, providing us with conceptual frames through which we encounter utterances, predict their length and structure, anticipate their end, and prepare responsive utterances” (Bawarshi and Reiff 82).⁵ Thus, genre is inherent to rhetorical and epistemological practices. As Eugene Garver notes, “the kinds of rhetoric are defined by their purposes and ends, by their practical and conventional contexts, by the methods they usually employ to accomplish those ends” (58). Moreover, as George Kamberlis argues, “genres are primary carriers of ideology” (126), articulating and disseminating ideological practices. An examination of literary texts as a site of epistemological and ideological structures is not unwarranted.

Yet, contemporary rhetorical criticism posits that genre is not solely about constraining boundaries but also about creative reconfiguration. In his work on the relationship between language and form, Russian language philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin has noted the genre functions as an exploratory space, writing “genres are subject to free creative reformulation” (80). Etymologically, the word *genre* speaks both to its Latin root *genus*, meaning “a kind or type” and to its Latin cognate *gener*, meaning “to generate” (Bawarshi and Reiff 4). As such, genres exist at the intersection of form and re-form and posit a relationship between constraint and creativity.

⁴ For a discussion of the link between human cognition and genre, see Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas N. Huckin, “Rethinking Genre from a Sociocognitive Perspective.” Berkenkotter and Huckin write, “genres are inherently dynamic rhetorical structures that can be manipulated according to the conditions of use and that genre knowledge is therefore best conceptualized as a form of situated cognition” (477).

⁵ See Mikhail M. Bahktin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*.

Genre may constrain, but it just as equally spurs creativity and re-generation, all under the guise of genre.

It is the flexibility and instability of genre that enables rhetors to deploy genre as a political, artistic, and ideological tool that enables a text to respond to shifting cultural circumstances. Genre is always inflected with the practices of the lived; it both shapes and is shaped by the social and political practices of the social world in which a given genre is being produced. As Louis Althusser elucidates, “Ideology is a matter of the *lived* relation between men and their world. . . . In ideology men do express, not the relation between them and their conditions of existence: this presupposes both a real relation and an ‘*imaginary*,’ *lived* relation. Ideology . . . is the expression of the relationship between man and their ‘world’” (233–234). Since genre lies at the interchange between the staid and the generative *and* between the real and the imagined, rhetors may deploy genre as a place of rhetorical action, calling to and calling upon disjunctures in the society and culture that surrounds it.

Simms’s texts, I would argue, actively deploy genre in this way. In particular, it is his ability to form, and then re-form, literary genres that marks Simms’s work from the onset of his career. In this way, Simms’s texts may be viewed under the framework of Jacques Derrida’s law of genre: “Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet participation never amounts to belonging” (230). As such, texts do not “belong” to a genre; “each textual performance repeats, remixes, stretches, and potentially reconstitutes the genre(s) it participates it” (Bawarshi and Reiff 21). Over the course of his life’s work, Simms’s narratological styles evolve, remix, and disappear, calling upon literary scholars to grapple with Simms’s dynamic deployment of genre and to consider the way in which Simms’s texts are actively engaged in knowledge production and knowledge making. By tracing

the role of genres within Simms's oeuvre, this project demonstrates how Simms utilized and subverted traditional rhetorical structures as a means to explore the social, institutional, and material conditions of southern life.

CHAPTER 2: IN THE SHADOWS OF THE MIND: CONSIDERING SIMMS'S USE OF THE CONFESSION GENRE

How will your wonder, and that of your companions, be excited by my story! Every sentiment will yield to your amazement. If my testimony were without corroborations, you would reject it as incredible. The experience of no human being can furnish a parallel: That I, beyond the rest of mankind, should be reserved for a destiny without alleviation, and without example! Listen to my narrative, and then say what it is that has made me deserve to be placed on this dreadful eminence, if, indeed, every faculty be not suspended in wonder that I am still alive, and am able to relate it.

Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland* (1798)

In *The Transatlantic Novel and the Law, 1790–1860*, Bridget M. Marshall asks us to consider the relation between the generic conventions of the gothic and the textual practices of the legal system. For Marshall, the gothic novel employs the strategies of “extensive meta-textuality [derived from] multiple narrators, found documents, and embedded texts,” apparatus so essential, in her eyes, to courtrooms on both sides of the Atlantic (1). Similarly, in an essay entitled “Legal Fictions, Legitimate Desires: The Law of Representation in *The Romance of the Forest*,” Toni Wein contends that “the intricate design of Gothic novels both depends on and emerges from the Gothic’s fascination with the law” (291). It is interesting to note that William Blackstone’s discussion of property rights in *Commentaries on the Law of England* (1765–1769) links the legal and the gothic, describing the discourse recounted in the courtroom as “circuitities” and “labyrinths” and musing that “our system of remedial law resembles an old Gothic castle, erected in the days of chivalry, but fitted up for a new inhabitant” (268).

Equally, it would be remiss not to consider how the gothic’s fascination with the legal and its own rhetorical conventions are aligned with nationalist discourse. Deniz Kandiyoti

defines the gothic as a genre that “presents itself as both a modern project that melds and transforms traditional attachments in favor of new identities and a reaffirmation of authentic cultural values culled from the depths of a presumed communal past” (378). As Nancy Armstrong writes, “gothic tropes render unthinkable whatever modern culture places beyond the limits and within the lacunae of rationality and realism. . . . To read a novel, readers must strive along with the protagonist to make out of the available cultural materials a world that appears to be a seamless and stable whole” (106). As such, the gothic novel situates itself in a fluid space where the past and present merge—and foster—a new space for identification. The ability to define this new space as authentic relies on the assumption that it is textual productions that give rise to authenticity. Gothic novels, therefore, root their narratives in texts: in found manuscripts, spoken confessions, handwritten notes, with these written and spoken texts serving as sites of authority. Equally, though, these texts interrogate the nature of justice, specifically what can be believed and what cannot be trusted. Whether spoken or written, the embedded texts of a gothic novel become sites of interrogation, places for the reader to consider the veracity of a particular tale or teller. In this way, the rhetoric of the gothic, in Sue Chaplin’s words, “explores the impossibility of coherent judicial narratives” (174).

Examining William Gilmore Simms’s gothic novels under this lens is not unwarranted. As legal scholars would attest, the law, in its broadest and most narrow sense, constructs a narrative that both informs and reflects a nation’s practices and its ideologies.⁶ Symbiotic at its core, legal discourse functions along a binary: the law writes the nation, and the nation writes the

⁶ See Peter Brooks and Paul Gerwitz, eds., *Law’s Stories: Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) to start. Scholars of legal rhetoric would distinguish between the terms “law and literature” and “law in literature,” seeing the former as a discipline in which a study of law and the legal culture of a particular time underscores our understanding of literature. As the legal is a primary way by which humans make sense of their world (see Richard Lyman Bushman, “Farmers in Court: Orange County, North Carolina 1750–1776,” in *The Many Legalities of Early America* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001. 388–413]), examining the link between law and literature offers a broader context by which to understand the human experience.

law. Legal scholar Rebecca J. Scott would agree. In her *Michigan Law Review* article “Public Rights, Social Equality, and the Conceptual Roots of the *Plessy* Challenge,” Scott asks scholars to consider the interchange between the legal *and* the historical, the legal *and* the literary, the legal *and* the lived. She writes: “the dialogue between historians and legal scholars is productive precisely because historical context is not simply a backdrop, a state setting, or an external force pressing judicial events in one way or another. A full historical context incorporates wide networks of social interaction and situates legal and other initiatives within shared and competing structures of discourse” (780).

As Perry Miller attests in *The Life of the Mind in America*, lawyers and legal thought were crucial to literary development in the antebellum period. In *Law and Letters in American Culture*, Robert A. Ferguson concurs and reminds us that law and letters dominated American literary aspirations. Early America abounded with those who trained for the law, those who wrote law, who harbored wishes to write literature, and one of those writers-lawyers was William Gilmore Simms. A native of Charleston, South Carolina, Simms trained in the practice of law under the tutelage of Charles River Carroll, “a wealthy attorney with literary proclivities” (Guilds 18). By the age of 21, Simms was admitted to the bar of South Carolina—all the while serving as an editor of a Charleston literary miscellany. Author of tales, sketches, poems, editorials, literary criticism, and eventually novels; practicing attorney and later an elected South Carolina state legislator; and newspaper editor and political orator, Simms existed in a world in which the legal and the literary were continually intertwined.

Thus, a turning to Simms’s gothic works allows one to consider the ways in which Simms interrogates the uneasy divide between the rational and the horrific, the logical and the grotesque, and the legal and the lawless within the genre of the gothic. Underpinned by his

interest in law and his interest in literature, Simms's early gothic texts consider such complex topics as narratology and self-identity, all under the guise of a story of terror and horror. In particular, it is his gothic novels that are written as full-length confessional narratives that theorize the ways in which narratology and forensic discourse serve to construct interior and exterior spaces, including those of the mind, those of the natural world, and those of the domestic sphere. In both concept and design, Simms's full-length confession narratives may be seen as progenitors to the early southern grotesque, and a look to Simms's first novel *Martin Faber: The Story of a Criminal* and his 1841 novel *Confession, or, The Blind Heart; a Domestic Story* reveals the link between psychology and storytelling. In particular, Simms's confession narratives intimate that it is through the act of storytelling that the self is perpetuated and performed.

The Genre of the Confession

The genre of the confession has long been a staple of Western literature, the most famous examples being Saint Augustine's *Confessions* (397–400 A.D.) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Les Confessions* (1782). Scholars have long rooted the genre of confession within the genre of autobiography. In his seminal essay "Limits and Conditions of Autobiography," early autobiographical theorist Georges Gusdorf delineates the necessity of the concept of self-consciousness in the production of autobiography. He writes "autobiography is not a simple recapitulation of the past; it is also an attempt and the drama of man struggling to reassemble himself in his own likeness at a certain moment of his history" (43). While historical awareness is the necessary precursor for biography, autobiography requires a "spiritual revolution: the artist and model coincide, the historian tackles himself as object" (31).

In the vein of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, the confessional genre forces the historian-as-object to confront his own flaws and misdeeds, and it is the rhetorical act of confession that demands our attention as critical readers, as literary historians, and as simply humans. As E.V. Ramakrishnan writes in reference to *Confessions*,

It is as a psychological document that Augustine's book compels our attention . . . It is not so much Saint Augustine's Christian metaphysics that interests the modern reader as his agonizing search for faith through successive mental crises... The various scenes that Augustine describes indicate a new creative experience of the author, through which he understands himself. . . Augustine addresses himself to such basic questions as the cause of sin, the reality of evil and the nature of faith because his mind operates in an existential framework underlying which is the dialectics of the self's evolution (2).

Dovetailing with Ramakrishnan's observations, Rita Felski distinguishes the confession narrative as one in which "self-analysis is valued not for its own sake but as a means of exposing the fallibility of humanity and affirming the ultimate authority of a divine knowledge beyond the individual's grasp" (87). As a rhetorical activity, confession affords the admission of wrongdoing, the recognition of human fallibility, and metacognitive awareness: one reveals one's life in the hope of (some)one's understanding that life. I mean here to note a distinction between the rhetorical concept of confession and the rhetorical concept of apologia. In "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of Apologia," B. L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel delineate the typology of the genre, noting that rhetors of apologies seek acquittal and absolution, attempt an explanation or seek vindication, and seek justification and/or transcendence. In this way, apologies are directed to an outside audience for forgiveness and affirmation. Confession, although it can occur in public spheres, is marked by "the reflective recognition and the relational movement of the self *through* audience" (Farrell 118). It is the self performing the self.

Confessional narratives proliferated in antebellum literature. In *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace: New England Crime Literature and the Origins of American Popular Culture, 1674–1860*, Daniel A. Cohen considers the origins of crime narratives in early America. Gallow sermons were a critical element of the early print circulation; their inherent popularity coupled with efficacious circulation practices allowed these texts to reach a substantial reading population within a large geographical area (4–5). A move to quasi-fictional execution sermons occurred in the early eighteenth century with the genre moving from the province of ministers to the province of the popular press.⁷ Crime broadsides exploded as a genre throughout the century and included execution sermons, trial reports, periodical accounts and other nonfictional crime reports (Cohen 13). With the subsequent expansion of print culture and particularly the development of the novel was marked by, what Cohen terms, “a popular literature of crime that was at once legalistic, journalistic, and romantic” (34). Accounts of illicit sexuality, criminal misbehavior, and legal accounts filled the pages of popular literature.⁸

In her discussion of gothic narratives of murder in *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination*, Karen Halttunen notes the movement to secular crime narratives as one that “explicitly instructed readers to experience horror in the face of crime and didactically explained the precise nature of that emotional state, which typically rendered the person experiencing it speechless and unable to assign meaning to the event in question” (3). While the execution sermon elucidated that action was rooted in universal moral depravity, the

⁷ Cohen notes, for example, the publication of “A True Relation of the Murder Committed by David Wallis On his Companion Benjamin Stolwood, On Saturday Night, the First of August, 1713” and “A Brief Relation of Remarkables in the Shipwreck of above One Hundred Pirates, Who were Cast away in the Ship *Whido*, on the Coast of New England, April 26, 1717” in compilations of execution sermons (10).

⁸ Although not within the frame of this discussion, it should be noted that the debate over capital punishment feeds into legal documents, religious discourse, and fictional accounts of the time. See Paul Christian Jones, *Against the Gallows: Antebellum American Writers and the Movement to Abolish Capital Punishment* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011) to start.

fictional crime narrative offered less certainty, harkening to the fundamental unknowability of evil. Moreover, the gothic's novel conflation of sexual behavior and murder, as well as domesticity and murder, offered a counterpoint to the popular sentimental novel of the time.

A Murderer's Confession

While critical attention has been paid to literary sensationalism in the Northeast, southern spaces offer significant sites by which to interrogate fictional stories of crime and murder, and while studies of southern literature are quick to turn to twentieth-century texts as exemplars of the southern gothic, yet an examination of one of its earliest manifestations, Simms's 1833 novel *Martin Faber*, enables us to explore the roots of the movement. A reworking of Simms's 1829 short story "Confessions of a Murderer," *Martin Faber* is considered one of the earliest fictional representations of the psychology of a criminal. Now seen as the progenitor to many of Edgar Allan Poe's works, specifically his 1839 short story "William Wilson," the novel was decreed a popular and critical success of its time. In a critical review, Poe would write in regards to the novel: "While there are several of our native writers who excel the author of *Martin Faber* at particular points—there is no one who surpasses him in the aggregate of the higher excellences of fiction" (qtd. in Guilds 47). In particular, Poe praised Simms's "vigorous imagination," "artistic skill," and "life and movement" in story development (qtd. in Guilds 47). Other critics compared Simms to Charles Brockden Brown, and in later writings, Poe would acknowledge his own indebtedness to Simms.

Martin Faber juxtaposes the rational and the irrational, harkening to a world where confession can beguile and bewitch—and, in fact, become a site of the grotesque itself. The novel's confessional structure affords the opportunity to unpack how rhetorical and narratological choices serve as a means to tell one's story—a point to which Simms himself

alludes in chapter seven with a reference to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's narrative poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798). As we listen to the story of a murderer, we are asked to attend to the ways in which the embodiment of evil can be aligned with the power of an introspective mind that wavers between rationality and irrationality. The narrator's confession considers the ways in which biological, social, and cultural forces have shaped Martin Faber, an early exploration of what naturalistic writers would do later in the century; portrays the destruction of the feminine and the domestic at the hands of the grotesque; and situates the rural southern landscape as a signifier of both psychological and moral disorder. Hauntings reverberate throughout this text: Faber's own haunting by the image of Emily, whom he has murdered, and Harding's inner turmoil from hearing the story of the murder. *Martin Faber* captures that which haunts us, that what destroys us, and that which we destroy, all under the guise of a story that *must be* told. This novel suggests storytelling is a site of negotiation: between speaker and listener, between present and past, between the rational and the irrational, between the normalized and the unexpected, between order and disorder. If the story told is one that reveals the innermost workings of the mind, then the novel suggests the grotesque lies in those moments of self-negotiation—in the crevices and synapses of the human mind.

The first edition of *Martin Faber* includes an advertisement acknowledging the text was "an experiment, and the style and spirit, it is believed, somewhat out of the beaten track" (1). From the start, the narrator establishes the authenticity of the character Martin Faber as one that is "genuine and unexaggerated" (2). Faber is not an exaggerated fictional persona; instead, the character "may be found hourly in real life" (2). The narrator then notes the *purpose* of the work is "moral" (2). Simms offers a didactic purpose to his characterization: Faber's story is to show "the necessity of proper and early education," not solely at school but also in the home, "the

parental dwelling—under the parental eye—in the domestic circle—at the family fireside” (2).

As such, Simms positions his novel as the antithesis of domestic fiction: the tale of a young man who, despite familial bonds and societal advantages, commits atrocious acts out of his very nature. “A selfish and wanton character . . . a liar and a murderer,” Martin Faber is “not unnatural—you may seem him daily. He walks London with audacity, where, we are told, there are five thousand people well disposed to defy the laws, and cut your throat for a shilling. We see him in New York, in Massachusetts, at Mobile and New Orleans. The character, unhappily for humanity, is but too common to be considered altogether unnatural” (3).

What Simms’s tale does is relocate the horrors of urban spaces to rural ones. While urban periodicals would decry the criminality of city spaces, rural sites were less commonly depicted as such. Yet the novel’s confessional structure presumes a willingness to engage in sympathetic identification: “to trace . . . [the crime’s] causes—to describe its sources—to probe the wound, and to declare its depth” (3). The sympathy derives not necessarily from identification with the malefactor, but from the recognition of the ubiquity of amorality and the acknowledgment of its roots in human nature and in education. In this way, Simms’s *Martin Faber* problematizes Elizabeth Barnes’s argument in *Love’s Whipping Boy: Violence and Sentimentality in the American Imagination* (2011). Barnes extends her argument from *States of Sympathy* (1997) and posits that violence in nineteenth-century texts functions as a means of sentimental transformation in which “such transformations do not, as one might imagine, constellate around the victims of violence, but rather the perpetrators of it” (2). In fact, Barnes argues that “aggressive expressions become the medium for spiritual regenerations that, somewhat paradoxically, produce their own self-lacerating effects” (2). It is, accordingly, “through their demonstrations of aggression that the strong identify themselves with the weak to

become the self-proclaimed victims of the violence they employ” (Barnes 2). Functioning counter to Barnes’s thesis, Faber’s acts of aggression never reach the point of “generat[ing] identifications that substantiate a notion of American character itself as exceptionally empathetic” (Barnes 3). In Simms’s novel, Faber’s vehement passions, to use Philip Fisher’s phrasing, never transcend to self and/or social knowledge on Faber’s part.⁹ Instead, they perpetuate the notion of an unredeemable character, and it is the narratological choice to tell Martin Faber’s story as first-person narration that never allows us to empathize—or even sympathize—with Faber. In his explanation, Faber unconditionally declares he had no other choice, that “fate” drove him. The listeners to the tale (that is, in the course of the novel, the character Wiliam Harding and, by extension, the readers) never move to identify with the testifier. Harding, in fact, finds himself haunted by Faber’s story if anything. Thus, Faber’s confession never reaches antebellum culture’s understanding of sympathy. As Elizabeth Barnes writes in *States of Sympathy*, “sympathy connotes identification: not feeling for a person, from a distance, but with or alongside of a person” (32).

In this way, the forensic discourse in the novel proves that empathy and identification are conversely related: that one is unable to empathize when one is unable to identify with an individual’s actions. In his seminal text *A Rhetoric of Motives*, rhetorician Kenneth Burke builds on the Aristotelian concept of ethos and posits a primary tenet of persuasion: that “you can persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, [and] idea, *identifying* your ways with his” (55). In order for identification to occur, the audience must align themselves with an other. The process of sympathetic identification transpires through one or more of the following processes: a shared identification

⁹ See Philip Fisher, *The Vehement Passions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

with a source of authority (i.e., the church, the government, the school); a perceived identification with a demographic marker (i.e., sex, gender, social class, economic standing); a shared identification with a personal, political, or societal value (i.e., honesty, libertarianism, sustainability). In a Burkean process of identification, heroes—and villains—are determined by whom the audience chooses to identify with. “In the process of identifying with the hero symbols (persons, values, institutions) and actions in the dramatic conflict, the audience's attitudes and beliefs become congruent with the speaker's purposes” (Sanbonmatsu 37).

Simms writes with a first-person narrator whose eyes and thoughts have turned to the past, the temporal orientation expected in forensic confessions. Structurally, the novel recounts the testimony of Martin Faber as he stands with “the prospect of death” before him, and through the narrative, he seeks to answer his self-declared question: “Should I be considered the criminal in deeds so committed?” (5). Here then, forensic discourse becomes the means by which the criminally deviant is explained. The narrative seeks to contain the grotesque landscape, a landscape evinced in Faber’s mind as well as in the external world.

Faber’s statement begins with his removing himself from any responsibility of his misdeeds: “I was but an instrument in the hands of a power with which I could not contend” (5). Moreover, he asserts that he, even in the present moment, lacks self-discernment, noting “I am dazzled and confounded at the various phases of my own life. I wonder at the prodigious strides which my own feet have taken—and as I live and must die, I am bold to declare,—in half the number of instances, without my own consciousness” (5). For Faber, his guilt is a question of agency: “Had not my arm been impelled—had not my mood been prompted by powers and an agency apart from my own, I had not struck the blow—I had not scorned the supposed

obligation—I had not rejected the terms upon which society tendered me its protection” (5). As such, Faber removes himself from both moral and intellectual responsibility.

Faber’s self-defense, if his discourse can be called that, commences with his recounting his familial background. “The only son of German parents—people of a good family,” Faber comes from a family of “fortune and respectability” (6). The only son of “the first man of the village,” a man recognized by the town as “their counsellor” whose “word was law” and who “had none set up in opposition to his supremacy,” Faber was raised in a world of order and rationality (6). However, for Faber, this world is also the source of his “fated” future: “had [his father] bestowed more of this time upon the regulation of his household, and less upon public affairs, the numerous vicious propensities, strikingly marked in [him] from childhood up, had, most probably been sufficiently restrained” (6). For Faber, “it was fated...it was written” (6).

If later in the century naturalistic writers would claim the body as a site by which biological and social Darwinism was made manifest, Simms can be seen as an early proponent of naturalism.¹⁰ As both his physical body and emotional stance attest, Faber is a self-described brute, oversized in body, insolent in behavior, and isolated in thought. It is this, coupled with his pure belief in the role that nature and education have played in his upbringing, that posits Martin Faber’s character as one who sees himself writ large into a naturalistic universe. Claiming himself as “the pet of his mama, the prodigy of his papa,” Faber asserts that “the freedom of the common, and . . . a common freedom in the indulgence of [his] moods and passions” (6), which has created an intractable Faber. As the narration notes, “[He] cared little to learn, and [his] tutor dared not coerce [him]” (6). Disdainful and disrespectful, Faber disregards his elders. As he himself recounts, “I was a truant, and exulted in my irregularities, without the fear or prospect of

¹⁰ For a discussion of American literary naturalism, first see Donald Pizer, *Realism and Naturalism in American Literature*, (New York: Russell & Russell, 1976).

punishment. I was boorish and brutal—savage and licentious. To inferiors I was wantonly cruel . . . To the servant, the schoolmaster, the citizen, and even to my parents, I was rude and insolent” (7). Never compliant or complacent, Faber lives in an abyss of amorality: “I had no respect for authority—no regard for morals. I was a brute from education, and whether nature did or did not, contribute to the moral constitution of the creature which I now appear, certain I am, that the course of tutorship which I received from all around me, would have made me so” (8). Faber, by his own account, remains unrepentant and unredeemable.

In contrast to Faber stands his classmate and friend William Harding, whose body and personality also bear the biological markers of his determinant history. The latter was raised in the world of the grotesque: his father was murdered, and it is the sight of the body, upon its return to the home, that causes his then-pregnant mother to weaken and go into labor. Both he and his mother will survive, albeit poorly, with the Harding child’s body weak, hopeless, and terror-ridden. Yet, also in the vein of his mother, Harding is a “blameless character, [with] a disposition that most amiable and shrinking” (8). Susceptible to his own nerves and silenced by an innate sense of dependence, Harding is marked by “his weakness, his terrors” (8). The antithesis of Faber *and* Faber’s passions, Harding functions as a doppelganger, a signifier of sensibilities, his enervated body and spirit calling upon, as no one else can, Faber’s sympathy.

It will be Faber’s desire to protect Harding that will push the narrative to its inexorable end. Simms here sets in motion a concatenation of events: Punished for having been unprepared for his lessons, Harding must don “a badge made of a common card” bearing the word “idler” for an afternoon (9). When Faber seeks out the reason for Harding’s behavior and learns Harding had been caring for his ill mother and was unable to complete his schoolwork, Faber viciously tears the badge from Harding and destroys it, an act marked by its overt rebellion and

sympathetic identification. Nevertheless, Faber's action will have severe ramifications. When Harding appears the next day without the badge, Faber will vociferously declare what he did—and laugh in the face of his tutor Michael Andrews as he does so. In return, Andrews strikes his face.¹¹ Banished to a nearby study adjacent to the classroom, Faber will viciously destroy the globes, purchased by his teacher “at a heavy cost, not without great difficulty, from his little savings” (11). Knowing it was “the severest injury he could inflict upon their owner,” the boy destroys them by pouring a bottle of ink upon the “beautifully varnished and colored outlines of the celestial regions” (11, 12). Upon seeing the destruction wrecked on his possessions and “ascertain[ing] the evil, for a truth, the evil” that had been perpetuated, Michael Andrews cries, tears “rolling as freely as from the eyes of childhood, down his lean and wrinkled face” (12). In response, Faber exalts, “I gloated in his suffering” (12).

The school day incident will catalyze the remainder of the plot. Faber's fiend-like emotions and response cause him to be expelled from school, but it will be Faber's re-rendering of these events in a testimony that locates any and all blame with Andrews. In his rendition of events, Faber effaces his own responsibility, a process by which testimony becomes a site of textual manipulation and fiction becomes a place to dissemble. Michael Andrews will be exiled from the town by Faber's very own father and will seek refuge in the far-off countryside with his wife and four children. It is a retreat the young Faber will watch with “exult,” an expression the townsfolk will mark as they watch the boy, not knowing quite where the truth lies (13).

As Faber matures, his outward behavior confirms to that which is expected given his social standing. Yet inwardly, he reverberates with “a general hostility to human nature and the

¹¹ For a discussion of corporal punishment, childrearing, and masculine aggression, see Richard Brodhead and Gail Bederman to start. In *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America*, Brodhead suggests that cultural backlash against violations to the body would lead to a new model for childrearing. In *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917*, Bederman discusses the interchange between control and impulse in late nineteenth-century childrearing practices.

things of society” (15). Ensconced in a primal interior world where there is “little balm or beauty,” Faber pointedly asseverates, “Talk not of Greenland darkness, or Norwegian ice. The moral darkness is the most solid—and what cold is there like that, where, walled in a black dungeon of hates and fears and sleepless hostility, the heart broods in bitterness and solitude, over its own cankering, malignant or misdirected purposes” (15). Here is the heartless man.

Now a self-described “idler” who does not need to work or have to work, an ironic use of term given that was the very name given as punishment to Harding, the isolated Faber takes to wandering the umbrage-laden landscape of the countryside. It is a space that Faber describes with such word choice as “sacred,” “dreamy,” “love[ly],” so much so that he “was won by its charms, and pursued all its bendings” (16). The bucolic will serve as the site of love and death. For here Faber will first encounter the sweet and uncultivated voice of a tall and beautiful girl—it is first her song he hears, a strain so simple and thoughtful that it physically affects him.¹² Marked by her innocence, Emily Andrews seems, even to Faber, “strange! That she should be condemned as a sacrifice to the wishes of the worst and the wildest,” but for this young man, “to do wrong was to be myself—it was natural” (18). Their initial chat turns to daily visits turns to intimacy, all “in the quiet and secluded bower where she lay in his arms” (19). His thoughts following her seduction are telling: “body and soul, the victim was mine. She was no longer the pure, the glad, the innocent and unstained angel I had first known” (19).

However, their relationship of several months becomes threatened by her importuning for marriage, his contrary desire to marry for financial security, and her learning of his engagement

¹² It should be noted that this character, Emily Andrews, will turn out to be the daughter of Michael Andrews, the tutor Martin Faber had exiled from the town. As such, the deflowering of Emily and her subsequent murder are even a more perverse manifestation of Faber’s hatred of the elder Andrews. It should also be noted that at this point in the novel, Michael Andrews has memory loss; thus when his daughter introduces him to Faber, he does not recognize him, signifying, again, the unrecognizability of pure evil.

to another.¹³ Emily's threats to expose him—to declare his hypocrisy and villainy to the town and his fiancée—cause Faber to “hurl her to the ground” (25). Recognizing he was “no longer a reasoning—a conscious being” and despite noting her imploring and desperate eyes, he “felt a fury within him—a clamorous anxiety about his heart—a gnawing that would not sleep and could not be quieted, and without a thought of what he was to do” (25), Faber fastens her by the neck and, despite her struggles to free herself, invokes an even more painful grasp and kills her with his own hands.

A look to Leslie A. Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* can help situate this scene as a moment where reason and romanticism devolve into the abyss of the grotesque. Fiedler writes, “But America is not exclusively the product of Reason—not even in the area of legend. Behind its neo-classical façade, ours is a nation sustained by a sentimental and Romantic dream, the dream of an escape from culture . . . the heirs of Rousseau are Chateaubriand and Cooper, after whom the world of togas and marble brows and antique heroism is replaced by the sylvan scene, across which the melancholy refugee plods in search of the mysterious Niagara or where Natty Bumppo, buckskinned savior, leans on his long rifle and listens for the sound of a cracking twig” (37–38). Yet, “in Sentimentalism, the Age of Reason dissolves into a debauch of tearfulness; sensibility, seduction, and suicide haunt its art even before ghosts and graveyard takes over . . . The final horrors, as modern society has come to realize, are neither gods nor demons, but intimate aspects of our own minds” (38).

¹³ While clearly an age-old literary trope, a similar plotline exists in Theodore Dreiser's naturalistic novel *An American Tragedy* (1925), where Clyde Griffith's primal desires will bring him into a relationship with Roberta Alden. Roberta's subsequent pregnancy, Clyde's hesitancy to marry her, and Roberta's demands that they marry will lead Clyde to consider killing Roberta. In a climactic scene on the lake, as Clyde ponders his decision to kill her, Roberta notes “You look so--so strange—so—so—Why, I never saw you look like this before” (492) and reaches forward, catapulting the canoe into the lake. In a parallel scene in *Martin Faber*, Emily reaches forward to Faber, noting “your words and look, Martin just now were so strange and unnatural that I was almost afraid of you” (23).

The horror of Faber's actions reverberate in the landscape, for in the moments following Emily's death, all Faber can see is his final vision of Emily's eyes, the last thing Faber saw as he murdered her. Trees are hung with eyes, eyes look at him from the water that gushes by, as does a night of many stars where the heavens seems cluttered with thousands, all bending down terrifically upon him. Unable to withstand the denunciation, he pronounces audibly the name of his crime—Murder—"and ten thousand echoes give him back the sound" (26). The landscape is now with voice as well as eyes; the grotesque pervades both the internal and external landscape, both what Faber sees and how he sees himself.

As he buries her body beneath an ancient rock, a natural cavity built, he notes, for her "repose" (27), Faber offers the following soliloquy, which deserves to be quoted at length:

Such is our nature. We are proud of the power to destroy. I had never before doubted my capacity for evil—but I now felt—for I had now realized—I had exercised this capacity. There is something elevating—something attractive to the human brute, even in being a destroyer. It was so with me. There was an increased vigor in my frame—there was new strength and elasticity in my tread—I feel assured that there was a loftier, a manlier expression in my look and manner. But, all was not so in my thought. There everything was in uproar. There was a strange incoherence, an insane recklessness about my heart, where, if I may so phrase it, the spirit seemed prone to wandering about places of dread and danger. I kept continually repeating to myself, the name of my crime. I caught myself muttering over and over the word "Murderer" and that, too, coupled with my own name. "Murderer" and "Martin Faber" seemed ever to my imagination the burden of a melody; and its music, laden with never ceasing echoes, heard by my own ears, was forever finding its way to my own lips. (27).

If this moment is to serve, forensically, as a moment to invoke empathic identification, then that can only occur if one privileges the brute over the logical, evil over innocence, and destruction over beauty. Ultimately, one must vest power in the individual and acknowledge the presence and power of evil. According to Faber, one's actions must elevate one's frame and increase one's masculinity; they must generate vigor, strength, and elasticity in look and demeanor. Yet as Faber avows this, his thoughts betray him: there is "insane recklessness about

his heart,” his internal spirit seemingly “wandering about places of dread and danger” and where his fancy is “burdened” by an omnipotent desire to speak, for he himself notes, “I caught myself muttering over and over the word ‘Murderer’ and that, too, coupled with my own name Martin Faber. . . . a melody of burden that was forever finding its way to my lips,” a horrific melody ironically juxtaposed with the delightful melodious strain that first drew him to Emily (27).

Undeniably, this text links women and the domestic with the grotesque and, particularly, with violence and death. Women’s bodies are sites of misogynistic torture, places where unnatural horrors are perpetrated on the female body and spirit. The loss of female chastity results in literal death. Moreover, William Harding’s mother’s difficult childbirth, Emily Andrew’s brutal murder, and Martin Faber’s hateful treatment of his own wife, Constance, bespeak a world where the domestic offers little comfort, particularly for a wife and/or female lover. For Faber, marriage holds “no happiness” (30), and he opines that she [his wife] “felt accordingly; and I am persuaded a greater curse could not well have fallen to her lot” (30). Faber will watch Constance’s face grow “paler and paler” as anguish grows in her eyes, her sole companion Faber’s still-faithful friend William Harding for whom, it seems to Faber, Constance has developed an unrequited love.

Simms’s early texts consistently victimize the feminine. In another early gothic novel, *Confession, or, The Blind Heart; a Domestic Story* (1841), Simms chronicles the life of Edward Clifford, the sole surviving son of deceased parents. Sent to be raised by an aunt and uncle in Charleston, Clifford feels ostracized by the world around him and describes himself as one whose sensibilities mark him as “one who goes forth with a moral certainty that he must meet and provide against an enemy” (13). Ignored by his foster parents, who further disregard him when their favorite young son, Edgar, dies of bodily weakness, Clifford takes refuge in a

friendship with a classmate William Edgerton. Like Martin Faber and William Harding, this is unlikely pairing: as Clifford describes, “In every other respect our moods and tempers were utterly unlike. I thought him dull, very frequently, when he was only balancing between jealous and sensitive tastes;—and ignorant of the actual, when, in fact, his ignorance simply arose from the decided preference when he gave to the foreign and the abstract. He was contemplative—an idealist; I was impetuous and devoted to the real and living world around me, in which I was disposed to mingle with an eagerness which might have been fatal” (18).

Clifford’s narrative is marked by a more staid pace than Faber’s; the former’s self-knowledge clearly evinced through a series of syllogistic statements as Clifford narrates his autobiography. Aware that he bears a “scornful and sad” demeanor (20), Clifford attributes its existence to psychological and philosophical causes. He writes, in reference to himself, “perhaps something of this temper is derived from the yearnings of the mental nature. It may belong somewhat to the natural direction of a mind having a decided tendency to imaginative pursuits. There is a dim, vague, indefinite struggle, for ever going on in the nature of such a person, after an existence and relations very foreign to the world in which he lives; and equally far from, and hostile to that condition in which it thrives” (20–21). As Clifford explicates, “the vague discontent of such a mind is one of the cause of its activity; and how far it may be stimulated into diseased intensity by injudicious treatment, is a question of large importance for the consideration of philosophers” (21). As he subsequently tries to philosophize the power of the mind, Clifford considers the role of the imagination, man’s need for autonomy, and the role of solitude in human existence. Logical, methodical, and precise, Clifford’s writing conveys his mind: a logical mind trying to come to terms with his interior life.

Unlike Faber, Clifford will find himself on the other side of the courtroom: preparing himself to study as an attorney following quitting his uncle's home, taking a job in a mercantile firm, and studying with William Edgerton, having been taken under the wing of Edgerton's father. In his first courtroom appearance, Clifford, "spoke, and spoke with an intenseness, a directness of purpose and aim—a stern deliberativeness, a fire and a feeling—which certainly electrified [his] hearers with surprise, if with no more elevated emotions" (47). His argument pulls together evidentiary material, human desire, and character witnesses, closing "with an appeal in favor of that erring nature, which, even in our own cases, led us hourly to the commission of sins and errors; and which, where the individual was poor, wretched, and a stranger, under the evil influences of destitution, vicious associations, and a lot in life, which, of necessity, must be low, might well persuade us to look with an eye of qualified rebuke upon his offences" (47). In this way, Clifford's forensic discourse mirrors trends in legislative developments of the time, specifically the rise of jury trials.¹⁴ As Thomas Morris explains in *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619–1860*, "By the end of the eighteenth century, the jury trial was extolled as the very 'palladium of liberty' . . . the juries were to take the law from the court and then find the truth or the falsity of the facts alleged" (216). Serving as templates by which justice could be meted out, fictional and nonfictional narratives provided frameworks by which juries could render just decisions.

If the trajectory of Clifford's story is one of a protagonist of humble, lowly background who can rise to societal position, then, despite the machinations of his uncle and the return of a long-owed creditor, he eventually finds himself married to his cousin Julia. For Clifford, these are halcyon days—"brief Eden moments of security and peace" (126). The landscape echoes with gaiety and joy, and the young married couple is blissful. Yet, as Clifford confesses, he

¹⁴ See Max Radin, *Handbook of Anglo-American Legal History* (St Paul: West Publishing, 1936).

carries his orphaned status and neglected childhood with him, feeling forever touched by loss and anger. As Clifford opines, “Was I happy? The inconsiderate mind will supposed this very probable—will say, I should be. But evil seeds that are planted in the young heart grow up with year—not so rapidly or openly as to offend—and grow to be poisonous weeds with maturity” (135). His primal fear is the loss of Julia for “the man who has but a single jewel in the world, is very apt to labor under a constant apprehension of its loss” (135). Thus, his “love—linked with impatient mind, imperious blood, impetuous enthusiasm, and suspicious fear—was a devotion exacting as the grave—searching as fever—as jealous of the thing whose worship it demands as God is said to be of ours” (135).

Yet despite Clifford’s ability to rationalize his behavior, know its sources and motivations, and be cautious in his outlook toward life, he just as much “little knew [himself]” (142). In this way, Clifford’s narration diverges from Faber’s as Faber’s ability to explicate himself lies solely in his exterior actions rather than with his internalized thoughts. For Clifford, the reason is easy to seek: he fears losing Julia and any threat to his manhood strikes him with insurmountable jealousy. His jealousy will arise with William Edgerton’s growing friendship with Julia, which stems from their mutual love of the arts. Byronic and brooding, Clifford winds up lost in the labyrinth of his own mind, and again, the narration mirrors Clifford’s internal world in the external world. As Clifford describes, “I now look upon a beautiful landscape like this: as a thing that is shortly to be desecrated—taken in vain—scratched out of shape and proportion upon a deal-board, and colored after such a fashion as never before was seen in the natural world, upon, or under, or about this solid earth” (159–160). Clifford retreats into his own mind, convinced in an Othello-like way that his wife has betrayed him, and the plot rushes to its

own inexorable end.^{15 16}

Harassed by his mother-in-law who, in her own Iago-like moment, questions her own daughter's sincerity and manipulates Clifford into believing Julia is involved with Edgerton, Clifford storms off. Faced by an internal debate where he attempts to reconcile obligation with offense, Clifford ponders,

It was a thing no longer to be thought upon. It was a thing to be done! This necessity staggered me. The kindness of the father, the kindness and long true friendship of the son himself, how could I requite this after such a fashion? How penetrate the peaceful home of that fond family with an arm of such violence, as to tend their proudest offspring from the parental tree, and, perhaps, in destroying it, blight for ever the venerable trunk upon which it was borne? Let it not be fancied that these feelings were without effect. Let it not be supposed that I weakly, willingly, yielded to the conviction of this cruel necessity—that I determined, without a struggle, upon this seemingly necessary measure! Verily, I then, in that dreary house and hour, wrestled like a strong man with the unbidden prompter, who counselled me to the deed of blood. I wrestled with him as the desperate man, knowing the supernatural strength of his enemy, wrestles with a demon. The strife was a fearful one. I could not suppress my groans of agony; and the cold sweat gathered and stood upon my forehead in thick, clammy drops. (197)

Clifford attempts to distract himself by wandering the streets of Charleston, and the narration diverges to a seemingly disconnected gambling subplot that speaks pointedly to the changing concepts of masculine honor in the South. The cost of this loss of honor will be highlighted further when Clifford returns home late that night and discovers his wife has suffered a miscarriage. He interprets her deluded ravings to her desire for Edgerton and condemns her deportment. Her pleas to her husband upon waking—"Do not kill me with cruel looks; with

¹⁵ As noted elsewhere in this project, many of Simms's works appropriate Shakespearean themes and/or incorporate Shakespearean allusions. In her essay "*Confession, or the Blind Heart: An Antebellum Othello*," Christy Desmet offers a historical account of theater performance of *Othello* in the antebellum South. She notes that "*Othello* was performed more times than any Shakespearean play except *Hamlet* . . . *Othello* also played at theaters in Natchez, New Orleans, Mobile, and smaller locales such as Macon, Georgia" (12). Desmet notes that both historical and personal records indicate "Simms himself not only attended, but also reviewed Shakespearean performances by such actors as Charles Kean, Thomas Cooper, and Edwin Forrest. On a trip to New Orleans in 1831, he saw Charles Kean in the role of *Othello*" (12).

¹⁶ Simms also reappropriates the motifs of *Othello* in his short story "Caloya; or, the Loves of the Driver" (1841) with a multiracial storyline that incorporates native Americans, a black slave, and white plantation owner.

words, that, if cruel from you, would sooner kill than the knife in savage hands. Tell me in what I have offended? What is it you think? For what am I to blame? What do you doubt — suspect?” (245). For Edward, the only escape from his personal haunting is a “mediated exile” as the title of chapter thirty six declares. In desperation of assuring his wife’s purity and keeping himself from murdering Edgerton, Edward moves himself and Julia to Alabama. There, “the whole world-wide West was open . . . A virgin land, rich in natural wealth and splendor, it held forth the prospect of a fair field and no favor to every newcomer. There it is not possible to keep in thralldom the fear less heart and the less active intellect . . . No mocking, stale conventionalities can usurp the place of natural laws” (269).

For Simms, the frontier states of Alabama, Mississippi, and more offered a new type of southern space, one beyond the seemingly citified Charleston environs, which, in many ways, were a recapitulation of Western European models of domestic space. As David Moltke-Hansen writes in “Between Plantation and Frontier: The South of William Gilmore Simms,” by the mid-1830s, “the South was taking geographic, social, and polemical shape before Simms’s eyes” (10), a diversification that gets integrated into the texts of Simms’s oeuvre. Thus, his frontier texts interrogate the divide between “the expectations, norms, and mores of the settled hierarchical plantation South and the physical, psychological, and social rudeness of the frontier” (Moltke-Hansen 10). This dichotomy is central to the world of Simms’s *Confession*, where Clifford’s attempts to maintain his staid identity of Charleston will fail in a space where the irrational mind conquers all. Clifford and his wife’s newfound “sweet delirium” will end with the arrival of William Edgerton who, due to illness, is traveling the southwest and arrives at their homestead in Alabama. Threatened yet again by Edgerton’s seeming friendship with his wife, Clifford enmeshes himself in his own world; “poetry and song were given up—we no longer

wandered by the river-side, and upon the green heights of [their] sacred hill” (318). Instead, Clifford’s “evenings are consumed in dreary rambles, alone with my own evil thoughts” (318). It is Clifford’s self-perpetuated interiority that further convinces him of Julia and Edgerton’s relationship and, in a sadomasochistic way, he will endeavor to bring Julia and Edgerton together while continuing to see their interactions as ‘proof’ of his beliefs. Bound by his interpretations, he “began to see the path—dark, dismal—perhaps bloody—which lay before me” (338). Despite Julia’s importuning that he stay by her side, “there was the rub—that doubt” (345). Convinced he must act, he challenges Edgerton to a duel, a moment that speaks to pre-antebellum concepts of honor. When Edgerton refuses to, Clifford demands his foe kill himself. As Clifford exclaims:

You must not refuse me the only atonement you can make. You must not couple that atonement with a sting. Hear me! You have violated the rites of hospitality, the laws of honor and of manhood, and grossly abused all the obligations of friendship. These offences would amply justify me in taking your life without scruple, and without exposing my own to any hazard. But my soul revolts at this. I remember the past—our boyhood together—and the parental kindness of your venerated parent. These deprive me of a portion of that bitterness which would otherwise have moved me to destroy you. Take the pistol. If life is nothing to you, it is as little to me now. Use the privilege which I give you, and I shall be satisfied with the event. (360)

Edgerton refuses to but admits his guilty conscience, causing Clifford to return home and poison Julia. It is only in the aftermath that Clifford learns the truth. Edgerton commits suicide, leaving a note that speaks of his advances on Julia and her refusals. Clifford then discovers a hidden trove of notes from Julia, which begins, "Husband, Mr. Edgerton deceives you—he has all along deceived you—he is neither your friend nor mine. I would call him rather the most dangerous enemy; for he comes by stealth, and abuses confidence, and, like the snake in the fable, seeks to sting the very hand that has warmed him” and, with a plea “to hear [her] to the end” proceeds to delineate Edgerton’s undesirable conduct toward her (388). In its own way, Julia’s confession

functions as a forensic text in its own right. Apart from the emotional pleas that pervade Edgerton's confession or the marked swing to controlled irrationality that Clifford's confession exudes, Julia's relies on stark description, logical underpinnings, and pathetic appeals. For Clifford, there is no respite from the guilt he now feels, and with a quick conclusion to the novel (little more than two pages remain), Clifford resolves, at the insistence of his friend Kingsley, to head to Texas. Geologically, the land offers no refuge for there "the rich empire of Texas—its plains, rich but barren—unstocked, wild-running to waste with its tangled weeds—needing, imploring the vigorous hand of cultivation. Even such, at that moment, was my heart! Rich in fertile affections, yet gone to waste; waiting, craving, praying for the hand of the cultivator!—Yet who now was that cultivator?" (398). For Clifford, the land and the mind offer no respite; instead, they function as metonymic markers of his own barren morality. Life, according to the narrative, is solely something to be "endured" (397). Clifford, despite all his maneuverings, has fallen victim to the narrative he has perpetuated.

For Martin Faber, life is narrative. When strolling with his childhood friend William Harding through the forest, and very near where Emily's murder occurred, Faber will unwittingly—or perhaps purposefully—confess to having committed murder. Faber will commence a Socratic interchange with "Harding, this is just such a spot, which one would choose in which to commit a murder!" (33). To which Harding will retort, "what could put such a thought into your head? This is just the spot now which I should choose for the inception of a divine poem. The awful stillness—the solemn gloom—the singular and sweet monotony of sound, coming from the breeze through the bending tree tops, all seem well calculated to beget fine thoughts,—daring fancies—bold and striking emotions" (33–34). The Lockean innocent to Faber's brute realist, Harding will defend the sanctity of life and decry murder as an action that

will lead to the disintegration of society. Faber, on the other hand, will posit the taking of a life as a means by which to “lope the years of life and thereby shorten so many of the victim’s cares and troubles” (34), a statement that merges logical fallacy with moral failing. In this simultaneously real-hypothetical conversation, Simms again alludes to antebellum legal practices, the divide between the judicial parties in the courtroom. For Harding, the judicial court holds omnipotence; for Faber, the individual does.

Faber will confess the murder to Harding in a tale that he says he *must* speak. Here yet again, Faber’s rendition proves the performative nature of storytelling, the ability to mutate the truth when telling one’s story. As Faber chronicles, “I could not resist the impulse—I was compelled to speak. It was my fate. I described my crime—I dwelt upon all its particulars; but with a caution, strangely inconsistent with the open confidence I had manifested, I changed the name of the victim—I varied the period, and falsified, in my narrative, all the localities of the crime; concluding with describing her place of burial beneath a tree, in a certain ground which was immediately contiguous, and well known to us both” (35).

If testimony or confession functions rhetorically as “a public utterance before an audience whose purpose is to evoke judgment by the self and by the other in which the self is judged by the self” (Farrell 3), then Faber’s text fails as an example of rhetorical confession: there is no explicit and true admission of wrongdoing, there is no remorse for the act confessed, the audience is not either the aggrieved party or the one empowered to acknowledge and forgive, nor is the magnitude of the confession equal to the magnitude of the crime. In fact, Faber’s testimony is a grotesque turn on the genre of the confession and forensic discourse; moreover, it is one that, disturbingly, leaves the listener as haunted as the speaker was in the moments following the murder.

Simms makes a direct reference to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of Ancient Mariner" in chapter eleven when Harding arrives at Faber's doorstep, pale, nervous in the last degree, and awfully haggard, importuning "I am miserable . . . since you breathed that accursed story in my ears. Tell me, I conjure you, Martin, as you value my quiet, that you but jested with me—that the whole affair was but a fabrication—a fetch of the nightmare—a mere vision of the fancy" (36). Yet Faber, as he describes, "persisted in the story—I was impelled to do so, and could not forbear" (36). He goes on to note, "You have read that strange poem of Coleridge, in which the 'Auncient Marinere' is made, whether he will or no, and in spite of every obstacle, to thrust his terrible narrative into the ears of the unwilling listener. It was so with me" (36). In a further inversion of narrative poem, it is Harding who is haunted by the teller's tale: "it keeps [him] awake at night. It fills [his] chamber with specters" (36). Haunted by visions of an unknown female's murder, Harding now feels compelled to speak. He describes to Faber,

she calls upon me to bring you to justice. I awake and she is muttering in my ears. She implores—she threatens—she stands by my bed side in the darkness—she shakes the curtains—I hear her words; and when I try to sleep, her cries of "Murder, Murder, Murder" are shouted and ring through all my senses . . . Assure me that it is untrue or I feel that I shall be unable to keep the secret. It is like a millstone around my neck and it makes a hell in my heart" (37).

In this way, *Martin Faber* positions storytelling as a living space, one where the teller and the listener mutually negotiate meaning, one where that negotiation affects both teller and listener, and one where storytelling has resonance beyond the physical act of telling.

If textual production is one way we make sense of the world, what we do in the presence of an unfathomable text, a text that is beyond the bounds of our understanding? Faber responds to Harding's plea to confess with pure derision coupled with a pathos-ridden call to Harding's honor and friendship. Harding will then find himself struggling with *his* own grotesque and irrational mind, which is now enveloped in an infernal battle between his personal history with

Faber and his own personal morality. In Harding's mind, the answer lies in the power of the law: its ability to mediate the wilderness and to transform the unfamiliar into the familiar, and he will accuse Faber of murder in court. When called to defend himself, Faber will mentally note that Harding's charge is solely "circumstantial minuteness" (38). Once again, he will employ narrative reconstruction, and as Faber himself recounts, "I denied all. I denied that I had ever made him such a statement—that we had ever had any such conversation; and with the coolness and composure of veteran crime, wondered at the marvelous insanity of his representations" (38). A subsequent investigation of the purported site of the murder will prove to no avail, Harding will be viewed as "a malignant wretch, who envied the felicity, and sought to sting the hand of him who had cherished and befriended him" (38), and Faber will walk away unscathed, proving the systems of law here and their incipient reliance on logic and rationality are ineffective in a battle with the grotesque and irrational mind.

The grotesque and irrational mind now belongs to Harding as he struggles against a wild and unknowable text—Faber himself. To deal with the irrational, Harding employs the rational. The two friends engage in daily walks and hunts, and in a similar mode, Harding vows to "hunt" Faber so as to discover the truth, making Faber a text that can be observed, noted, and read. Methodical in his approach, Harding meticulously surveys the landscape as well. As the narration notes, "Now nothing escaped his notice and attention. Tree and stump—hill and vale—wood and water—all grew familiar, and a subject of large and narrow examination. He seemed particularly solicitous of the true relations of things—of parallel distances—objects of comparative size, and the dependencies of a group, in the compass of his survey" (45). Systematic observations of Faber allow Harding to discern changes in Faber's breath, eyes, and complexion, the physical body revealing thoughts of the mind, as they meander the glen. It is

Harding's capacity for logic and observation and his capacity to imagine and project that allows him to "grow confident and strong in each hours of progression in his labor" (49).

It is just as equally Harding's ability to craft a different kind of narrative—a visual one—that furthers his relentless pursuit. For, as Faber recounts, "A week from this had not gone by, when, while under the hands of our village hair-dresser, I beheld a picture crowded among the hundred upon his walls, which filled me with astonishment, and awakened in my mind some moving apprehensions. I beheld the scene of my crime truly done to nature, and just by the little copse upon which the deed had been committed, stood a female form, pale and shadowy, and with a sufficient resemblance to Emily, to have been considered a portrait. You may guess my emotion" (50). It is Harding's ability, although Faber knows it not, to invoke other texts that testify to the crime and that recreate the grotesque landscape in other forms. The visual representation stirs Faber to the core, and he rushes to buy it, conceal it, or perhaps be tortured by his guilt—only to find three different versions of the drawing return to the gallery in the days that follow, renderings he admits he can not purchase without igniting suspicion.

William Harding, author of this visual machination, will author another text, recreating or perhaps, to use Joseph Roach's term, surrogating, the memory of the original with a performed (re-)enactment.¹⁷ On one of their hunts, Harding will take Faber right to the site of the murder where an assemblage of townsfolk stands. This multi-layered text, consisting of the murder site, the murder victim's family, the justices and townsfolk, creates its own justice system, one outside the framework of a courtroom. Nonchalant at first, Faber becomes slightly flustered when the mother of Emily rushes forth and condemns him, but it is not until Harding orders the rock under which Emily's body is buried to be removed, Emily's body is raised, and a brooch

¹⁷ See Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

with Faber's initials is found in her hands that Faber's culpability is reveal. Thus, the denouement of Simms's novel becomes a conflated interplay of texts upon texts, each one seeking to frame the grotesque and each signifying the concomitant vagary and physical presence of memory. Hinging upon testimony, whether spoken, seen, or enacted, to reveal the grotesque, this novel suggests we reveal our histories, through our words, our art, our performances; according to *Martin Faber*, it is the rhetoric of art coupled with the rhetoric of law that constructs our world and allows us to contain the irrational.

When one looks at authors like Simms, authors who are trained in or are practitioners of the law, it is remiss not to consider the ways in which the law gets written into their textual worlds. Simms's early gothic fiction is replete with stories of the law, with characters who are practitioners of the law and characters who are victimized by the disregard of moral, civil, or criminal law. Both the cityscapes and countrysides of Simms's world are populated by criminality and confessions, and, as Karen Haltunnen succinctly notes in her introduction to *Murder Most Foul*, "any story of murder involves a fictive process, which reveals much about the mental and emotional strategies employed within a given historical culture" (2). In this way, Simms's confessional narratives reveal much about the interior and emotional lives of nineteenth-century America and create a world where southern spaces are marked by grotesque physical and moral landscapes and where personal history and memory converge to haunt the interior landscape of the mind. *Martin Faber* captures both this internal and external haunting, all under the guise of a story that needs to be told, a rime, like that of the ancient mariner, that defines both the speaker and the listener, the past and the present. In doing so, the novel captures that fragile balance between the rational and the irrational, the expected and the grotesque, revealing the order and the disorder of the mind as one gives witness. Similarly, *Confession*

roots its tale in man's desire to embody rationality yet finds himself ceaselessly and subconsciously pulled back to irrationality. If we believe the grotesque lies at the moments when bestiality trumps morality, then Simms's novels and their use of forensic discourse to explicate that margin offer us a means by which to explore the beginnings of fictional renderings of the Southern grotesque.

Postscript: The Artist's Confession

Published posthumously in 2015, Simms's unfinished manuscript "Sir Will O'Wisp or the Irish Baronet; A Tale of its Own Day" offers one last glance at Simms's use of the confession narrative. As David W. Newton acknowledges in "Never a Whit Wiser, Never a Whit Less Human: Simms's Postwar Conversation with the Devil," this manuscript remained unfinished at the time of Simms's death in 1870. None of Simms's post-War letters specifically reference the writing of this text, only mentioning "smaller tales" (*Letters* 5:221) on which he was working, specifically ones "of imaginative, psychological, and spiritual character" (*Letters* 5:157). In fact, Simms's final deployment of the confession genre is marked by imaginative psychological and philosophical musings and is written in an experimental confession-conversation style that invokes classical, medieval, and Romantic imagery.

The first-person narrator pronounces the text to be a confession in the very first line, noting "it is scarcely the best social policy to begin the work of confession on one's first entry into the world, where, now-a-days, if men confess to any sins at all, they are such only as are sufficiently equivocal to pass for virtues; but, as my aim is a moral one, and my hope the reformation of this very infirmity among mankind, I know no better mode of beginning than to put myself *rectus in curia*, and make a clean break of it before I claim any further hearing. And so—to the work of confession" (128). The subsequent tale focuses on writer Richard Silex and

his just-recently-arrived familiar Sir Will O' the Wisp.¹⁸ The excerpt opens as Silex sits penning “a collection of the most fashionable negro melodies such as Jim Crow, Coal Black Rose, Clare De Kitchen, and other pieces of like moral, religious, national, and practical interest, with an elaborate philosophical and psychological inquiry into the susceptibility of the negro for the higher arts of statesmanship, poetry, and philosophy” (132). Sir Will arrives and offers his assistance for Silex's writing tasks, quickly taking upon the responsibility of the author's correspondence. Afterwards, Silex himself recounts, “I read with increasing amazement at every letter. He not only divined what I would have written, but prepared letters, admirably ‘adapted to cases,’ upon which my mind had as yet arrived at no decision” (136). When Silex queries what Sir Will wants from him, the latter declares he wants nothing for “we have more souls on hand than we know what to do with. They are literally rotting on our hands” (136).¹⁹

In a dream sequence evocative of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's “Kubla Khan” (1816),²⁰ Silex takes from Sir Will's snuff box and falls into a “dreamy sense, all languor and love..., realizing all the visions that made the charm of *dolce far niente*,²¹ as described in the delightful

¹⁸ The term will o'wisp or *ignis Faustus* derives from the British Isles. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes its first use in 1608 by English dramatist John Day and its first use in an American text by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in 1839. According to legend, the will o'wisp is a mischievous character, usually associated with the devil. See Newton and Katherine Briggs, *The Fairies in English Tradition and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967). The origins of Simms's particular “Sir Will O'Wisp” may be traced to his 1838 short story “Jack O'Lantern: A New Light Story” published in the *Southern Literary Messenger*. “Jack O'Lantern” is a shorter explication of the same themes seen in “Sir Will O'Wisp.”

¹⁹ Whether Simms meant this as a reference to the Civil War is uncertain.

²⁰ “Kubla Khan” is believed to have been written in 1797 but was published in 1816. Considered one of the primary texts of the British Romantic movement, the poem offers “a vision in a dream” replete with sensory imagery and a fragmented style. The poem links artistic creation with prophecy.

²¹ From Italian, meaning: “pleasant idleness”

retreats of Thomson's "Castle of Indolence"²² . . . I was under a spell . . . these sights . . . succeeded by sounds, sweet, soft, musical as the lute of Apollo . . . touched by the most gentle breezes from the South" (140–141). This exotic and erotic vision roots the artistic process in the pre-Romantic and Romantic traditions, transplanting their inspiration to a southern space. The life of an artist is one that transcends geographical and temporal bounds; the vision and the art of imaginative spaces foster experiential knowledge-making. As Sir Will opines, these momentary visions are "not the less real because you do not know them. They are yet to be known" (142).

As the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that the voice of Sir Will stands in for the artist figure who finds himself searching for both beauty and acclamation in a world that has increasingly turned away from a life defined by the soul and the mind. When Counsellor Gregorius Gander of the town of Mongrelia is introduced to Silex at a social function, the former denigrates Silex's life work, asserting "Well, I have heard that he makes verses, and conundrums, and things of that sort; but nobody here thinks anything of him here" (163). When Sir William questions Gander asking, "Is it possible! Can it be that you have never read his 'Lamia,' his 'Endymion,' his 'Aglaus,' his 'AEnone' and all those several fine and beautiful translations from the Greek which contributed so large a part of my intellectual treasure in the wilds of my mountain home?", the counsellor replies "I confess, my dear Sir William, that I know nothing of these writings, and I doubt if one person in a thousand of people even heard of them even by name" (163).

While David S. Newton argues that this confession narrative "asks readers to consider if art, the artist, or even the artistic imagination can survive in a diminished world" (122), the

²² "The Castle of Indolence" (1748) is an allegorical poem by Scottish poet James Thomson that takes as its subject the nature of the artistic self in a world of increasingly materialistic concerns. To start, see Sebastian Mitchell, *Visions of Britain, 1730–1830: Anglo-Scottish Writing and Representation* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan 2013).

confession equally serves as Simms's own elegy to his life's work. What do one's written productions mean at the end of one's life? What happens to one's legacy in the midst of personal, regional, and national change? What can art do in its moment and beyond it? Is art a temporal marker of a society, and is one's art easily effaced by popular whims? At the core, Simms's final narrative confession is the most poignant plea—the plea, to return to Georges Gusdorf's definition, “of man struggling to reassemble himself in his own likeness at a certain moment of his history . . . in which “the artist and model coincide, the historian tackles himself as object” (43). For Simms, the historian, the artist, the writer under study is he.

CHAPTER 3: IN THE SHADOW OF ONE'S DREAMS: SIMMS AND THE GHOST STORY

God turne us every drem to goode!
For hyt is wonder, be the roode,
To my wyt, what causeth swevenes
Eyther on morwes or on evenes,
And why th' effect folweth of somme,
And of somme hit shal never come;
Why that is an avision
And why this a revelacion,
Why this a drem, why that a sweven,
And noght to every man lyche even;
Why this a fantome, why these oracles,
not; but whoso of these miracles
The causes knoweth bet then I,
Devyne he.

—Geoffrey Chaucer, *House of Fame* (1379)

In Haints: American Ghosts, Millennial Passions, and Contemporary Gothic Fictions

(2011), Arthur Redding writes,

I want to remain generous and open to the real presence of ghosts. The ghosts in the books I will discuss paradoxically demand that they be hailed and recognized as genuine presences, even if they are not fully material. Ghosts exist not simply in the imaginations of characters, but in their own right; they are possessed so to speak, of a potent character and autonomy of their own. Ghosts have legitimate power, articulate real pains and desires, and refuse fully to be explained away as figments of diseased or troubled imaginations. Further, just as ghosts trouble the boundaries between life and death, they mark inter- and extracultural boundaries. The ghosts emerge at and often *as* the very disjunctures between a hypermodern and rationalist Western social order, on the one hand, and the displaced by thriving remnants of peasant or urban folk cultures, which modernization so often aims to stifle, dismiss, and subdue. . . . They are here. (6)

Redding asks us to consider ghosts as emblematic of the contemporary moment, signifiers of cultural disconnect. As we turn to our historical and literary past, we must inquire: Where is the figure of the ghost rooted in the American literary consciousness? Of what are they speaking? What inter- and extracultural boundaries are they interrogating? How should we *read* ghosts?

Thinking of William Gilmore Simms as an author of ghost stories can broaden our understanding of the ghost story in America. Simms's literary world is replete with potent and autonomous imaginings that exist within and against multiple boundaries, serving as signifiers of their own types of disjunctures. How might an exploration of these disjunctures help us better understand Simms's oeuvre, nineteenth-century American literature, and the early Southern ghost story? This chapter examines William Gilmore Simms' 1844 novel *Castle Dismal; or, The Bachelor's Christmas*, first published serially in 1842 in the *Southern Literary Messenger*. Following in the vein of Simms' early novels, including his 1833 novel *Martin Faber: The Story of a Criminal*, *Castle Dismal* is, at its very core, a southern gothic novel, containing the traditional demarcations of the gothic—a haunted chamber, a dismal castle, grieving and raging ghosts. Yet against this conventional backdrop lies a very modern tale of nineteenth-century bachelorhood, one that illuminates the battle between the sentimental and the rational. With a deeply layered narrative structure, Simms's text envisions a world where marriage can destroy the self, where the mind can overcome the body, and where the gothic functions as the embodiment of southern male anxiety in the waning days of the antebellum South. In turn, the novel, particularly with its palimpsestic intertextuality, foreshadows the impending modernity that would define late nineteenth-century America where the conventions of Southern life and of literature itself would become fragmented shards of what once was.

Set in Charleston, South Carolina at the approach of the Christmas holidays, Simms's novel is seemingly set far from the "Glimpses of the Dismal" that the title of chapter one proclaims. Historically, Christmas in the South brought with it an extended interval of leisure, evocative of an English countryside Christmas often replete with a fox hunt²³ and "the song and the dance, the frolic and the festival" as Simms's narrator himself muses (10). The Christmas season was a common theme for Simms, having written three novels with a Christmas setting. His 1852 novel *The Golden Christmas: A Tale of Low Country Life*, a comedic novel of manners, previously appeared in the *Southern Literary Gazette*. His short story "Maize in Milk: A Christmas Story of the South" was first serialized in *Godey's Lady's Book* from February to May of 1846 and was later published in 1853 in a collection with "Marie de Bernaire: A Tale of Crescent City," a gothic tale set in New Orleans. Both *The Golden Christmas* and "Milk in Maize" depict a traditional low country Christmas.²⁴

For Simms' *Castle Dismal*'s protagonist Ned Clifton, the time of frolic, festival, and family, is almost nonexistent for "Christmas was fast approaching, yet I had made no provision for the holidays. I had not yet succeeded in arranging the plan for the winter campaign. Everyone who would leave [the city] had already taken to himself wings and gone. I, alone, like 'The last rose of summer,'²⁵ . . . stood solitary in the deserted highways, looking about for my companions" (7). A man of privilege and property, the narrator had "no lack of invitations and

²³ See Penne L. Restad, *Christmas in America: A History*.

²⁴ See Stephen Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996). It should be noted that in his chapter "Wassailing Across the Color Line: Christmas in the Antebellum South," Nissenbaum addresses the racial history of the South as evidenced in the rituals of a southern Christmas. *Castle Dismal* absents antebellum racial relations with its focus on a limited cast of characters, none of whom are African American.

²⁵ From the poem "The Last Rose of Summer" by Irish poet Thomas Moore (1779–1852). The poem speaks to one who is left behind as "all her companions / are faded and gone" and "scentless and dead." The poem ends with the speaker pondering "who would inhabit / This bleak world alone."

solicitations . . . I had two uncles, five aunts, and more than forty less intimate relations, scattered around the parishes, each in full possession of adequate field and forest” (8). A welcomed member of the society of the landed gentry, Clifton is far from familially isolated. Yet, what marks his isolation is not only his countrymen’s exodus from the city, but his isolation from gendered norms: particularly, his fastidious wish to remain a bachelor. As Clifton himself describes,

a bachelor is naturally a fastidious animal, and grows more and more fastidious as he grows older. His folly lies in his fastidiousness, and cuts him off, no doubt, from many a pleasant privilege. He fancies that it confers others, which, if he himself is to be believed, have a much more grateful relish. But if there be a doubt on his head, there is one privilege which he possesses, that value of which is beyond all question. He has still the privilege of a choice, and that is something. (8–9)

Thus, whether choosing to spend the Christmas holidays—“Still with all these prospects and convictions, I remained undecided”—or cogitating on the nature of matrimony—“It destroys many a good heart and generous spirit”—Clifton remains mired in interiority (and indecision), “suffer[ing] from that restless yearning after the unknown” (10).

At the core, Clifton yearns to remain an unattached bachelor and, in his mind, alive.²⁶ For like the last rose of summer that relishes its youthful blooming life and notes its fallen, scentless companions, Clifton mourns the loss of his former companions, lost not to death but to marriage—yet in Clifton’s eyes, they are one and the same. Noting marriage’s “detrimental

²⁶ For a discussion of masculinity, see Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen, *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler, eds., *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Men, Women, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press); Dana Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Milette Shamir, *Inexpressible Privacy: The Interior Life of Antebellum American Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); and E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

effect” on one of his former schoolmates, Frank Ashley, he recollects their one-time “love of quiz, of merriment, of a broad practical joke—his hearty enjoyment of all life’s pleasures, and the perfect good nature which still predominated even over the excess of his animal vivacity” (11–12). This recollection is quickly juxtaposed with an allusion to William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as Clifton metanarratively conflates marriage with death as he “thinks of Yorick and Frank together,” pondering “where be your jibes now?—your gambols—your songs—your flashes of merriment—that were wont to set the table on a roar” (12).²⁷ Acknowledging the “base uses [to which] may we come at last” (12), Clifton can not reconcile the memory of what Frank once was, that is, a convivial bachelor, to what he is now, a married man. With a tone of angry disbelief, Clifton questions “how could he [Frank] subdue himself to this condition? He, so ardent, so impetuous—so much governed by impulse—so rebellious against all rule” (13). In Clifton’s mind, the whole “thing was unaccountable. The moral problem was beyond my powers of solution” (13).

The unaccountability might stem from the fact that early nineteenth-century life, as Jan Lewis argues in *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Virginia*, was marked by a postrevolutionary rejection of Jeffersonian values, and particularly in the South, there was an early catalyzation of Romanticism in attitude, culture, and behavior—a look to the work of Michael O’Brien, Richard Beale Davis, and W. J. Cash will confirm this point.²⁸ Thus within Simms’s clearly Romantic text is the story of a perennial bachelor, hoping against hope to remain mired in his personal past of bachelorhood as well as a cultural past of pre-modernity.

²⁷ Simms often invoked Shakespearean allusions in his texts. See C. Hugh Holman, “William Gilmore Simms: Theory and Practice of Historical Fiction” (Diss, U of North Carolina, 1949) for a discussions of Simms’s use of the Elizabethan dramatists.

²⁸ See W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1941); Richard Beale Davis, *Intellectual Life in Jefferson’s Virginia, 1790–1830* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1964); and Michael J. O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

Clifton notes his own hesitancy in the novel, alluding to his apprehension that he “might fall into some snares of marriage on this visit,—for a Southern Christmas is apt of produce such disasters in the best regulated families” (19).

Frank Ashley’s choice to marry recognizes that “patriarchal prerogatives were deeply embedded in the domestic law of every state in antebellum American, but perhaps nowhere were they so rigorously observed as in South Carolina” (McCurry 85). As Bertram Wyatt-Brown notes in *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, marriage was the linchpin to economic and social standing in the South. Of paramount concern was “suitability,”—“in age, situation of life...temper, and constitution” (202). Historiography has proven that marriage was seen as a means of garnering social mobility and financial security. Matrimony was a public business, one that was encouraged by both one’s family and one’s community, and worked to insure “continuations of custom and demands for conformity” (Wyatt-Brown 221), and it should be noted that the land and estate of Castle Dismal became Frank Ashley’s upon the presentation of his wife’s dowry.

Thus, Ned Clifton’s choice stands as the choice for individuated desire, a manifestation of what Nancy Armstrong would term “excessive individualism” as articulated in her theory of the necessary gothic in which the gothic functions as an ideological divide between that which is desired and that which is not.²⁹ The gothic text manipulates that divide as the characters battle a world in which “the dialectic of privilege and shelter is exercised: your privileges seal you off from other people, but by the same token they constitute a protective wall through which you cannot see, and behind which therefore all kinds of envious forces may be imagined in the process of assembling, plotting, and preparing to give assault” (Armstrong 235). For Clifton,

²⁹ Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of British Individualism from 1719–1900*.

privilege resides in his bachelorhood; for Ashley and his wife, it resides in an economically secure marriage, and it is of course interesting to note that Frank Ashley's landed position is secured by the passing of title of both land and estate from his wife's family to him upon their marriage, highlighting Wyatt Brown's observation that "marriage was the most convenient way to status and wealth" (208). As for Clifton himself, spending the Christmas holidays at the Ashleys' Castle Dismal becomes the site where he will battle the necessary gothic of nineteenth-century antebellum life or, at least, nineteenth-century antebellum life for individuals of a particular race, class, and gender.

A plantation is an apt setting for Clifton's internal debate. "From as early as the 1820s and 1830s, when John Pendleton Kennedy and others began publishing what are generally considered the first plantation novels, literary narratives about the plantation have typically revolved around issues of marriage and reproduction, whereby the continuity of the entire plantation system depends on the continuity of the white, slaveholding family" (Bibler 2).³⁰ It is Clifton's rejection of these cultural norms that permeates his identity. If the nomenclature of the Ashley home as "Castle Dismal" does not itself connote Clifton's view of marriage, then Clifton's description of the setting certainly accentuates it: he travels on a raw and cold day through the thick woods into the lonely country, evoking an aura of chiaroscuro³¹ where "neither sky nor sun could be seen," where "a passing skirt of cloud, alone, made its appearance through

³⁰ For further work on American plantation fictions, see Jessica Adams, *Wounds of Returning: Race, Memory, and Property on the Postslavery Plantation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); William Tynes Cowan, *The Slave in the Swamp: Disrupting the Plantation Narrative* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Elizabeth Christine Russ, *The Plantation in the Postslavery Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

³¹ Like Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe and other nineteenth-century American romantic writers, Simms's work is modeled after the European artistic style of chiaroscuro. As Simms writes in the advertisement that precedes the novel *Castle Dismal*, "the purpose of the author was to attempt something of that *chiaroscuro* in fiction which is productive of such fine effects in painting,—the distribution, in a novel manner, of his lights and shadows so as to produce results apart from those which naturally grow out of events and which are expected to arise from the mere medium through which they are beheld" (v).

some little opening which the trees over-head vouchsafed us, and this glimpse was just enough to increase the deepening effect of gloom,” where “vines clamored from one to another, and bore in their embrace...the yet undecaying leaves of which were also strewn thickly along our path” (15–16).

If the European gothic traditionally invokes the distant past, as Louis S. Gross and others suggest,³² the American gothic is situated in the present, yet a present laden with personal, local, and national traumas. In Southern gothic literature, the medieval castles of the Europe transform to a familial plantation. Bridget M. Marshall notes the dual significance of the southern plantation: Metonymically, it speaks to an American history rife with slavery and violence while serving as a symbolic referent to a fallen European aristocracy (6–7). In particular, Simms’ early romances evoke the Southern pastoral with grand plantations ensconced against a backdrop of green and dense forestlands. For Simms, the South—and its juxtaposition of the plantation and the frontier—are central to the construction of a sectional literature,³³ and for Simms, the construction of a national literature is dependent upon the existence of sectional literature.³⁴

The Ashley family mansion, whose “true name is ‘Eagle Aerie’, or ‘Eagle-Eron’ embodies the history of South Carolina in its essence: “it was a frontier habitation in the wars with the Yemassee...had, at other periods, answered the purposes of a dungeon...and more than

³² See Louis S. Gross, *Redefining the American Gothic: From Wieland to Day of the Dead* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989).

³³ For a grounding on Simms as a Southern writer, see John Caldwell Guilds, ed., *Long Years of Neglect: The Work and Reputation of William Gilmore Simms* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1988); John Caldwell Guilds and Carolina Collins, eds., *William Gilmore Simms and the American Frontier* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997); C. Hugh Holman, *The Roots of Southern Writing: Essays on the Literature of the American South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972); and Mary Ann Wimsatt, *The Major Fiction of William Gilmore Simms: Cultural Traditions and the Literary Form* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).

³⁴ See C. Hugh Holman, *The Roots of Southern Writing: Essays on the Literature of the American South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972) and William Gilmore Simms, *Views and Reviews in American Literature* for a discussion of Simms’ views on the construction of a national literature, particularly pages 77–78 in *Views and Reviews in American Literature*.

one State prisoner had found secure lodging for a night within its solid walls, while on his way to trial in the city” (16-17). Architecturally, its exterior shellwork of tabia invokes the European past as well as the low country natural landscape,³⁵ and its prominent magnolia tree “that triumph of the woods with its leaf of brightest green, glossy and glittering, and its flowers of white, that flung an impressive odor abroad upon the atmosphere” firmly situate its southern heritage (17). Yet the home is not without its signifiers of some medieval past: the climbing lichen that “steals up to the chimney top” across the moldy bricks conjures up “the image of some grey warrior of the middle ages, clad in rusty mail but with a sprig of holly in his helmet, and a ladies favor pinned to his breast” (17).³⁶ Undeniably the power of the gothic lies in its connection to affect, particularly its ability to incite the imagination and the emotion. Here, the architectural structure harbors an affective component: a “melancholy and chilling in the first approach” that all who cross its threshold indicate feeling (18). More importantly, the Ashley familial home has a haunted chamber, seen and heard only by the domestics and visitors but not by the Ashleys themselves.³⁷

The confluence of a haunted home and a Christmas story is not usual. Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* (1843) remains to this day the exemplar of the genre. Studies of the English ghost story suggest there was a clear transition from eighteenth-century to nineteenth-century ghost stories as the genre evolved from an oral tradition to a print tradition. In particular, the 1820s and the 1830s were rife with Christmas ghost stories, both in America and in England.

³⁵ The technique of tabia or “tabby” was brought by Spanish Moors to the South Carolina coast where oyster shells served as the base for the concrete and moss as the caulk.

³⁶ The alignment of a medieval past to the gothic present is a motif seen in the reappropriation of medievalism in works on both sides of the Atlantic.

³⁷ Here, an examination of Sir Walter Scott’s 1828 short story “The Tapestry Chamber” might be warranted. The short story chronicles an unnamed general who takes shelter at his former schoolmate’s home and is roomed in a chamber that the domestics view as haunted. The parallels are clear.

Recent scholarship posits that the prevalence of Christmas ghost stories in antebellum America and pre-industrial England served as a counterpoint to the latent yet encroaching sense of modernity and consumption; additionally, it presaged the growing debate about spiritualism. According to historian Tara Moore, Victorian Christmas ghost stories invoke an aristocratic feel with the “prevalence of rural, gentrified settings” and, thus, the “idealization of the country house Christmas” (88).

It is in this space that Clifton will encounter his greatest fear, the personal cost of marriage, in multiple iterations: the marriage of Frank Ashley and his wife, the arrival of potential beau Elizabeth Singleton, and the ghostly appearance of, first, a distressed female, then her distraught husband, and then her lover. For him though, the greatest challenge awaiting is the purported haunted chamber. Throwing down the gauntlet—in this case, with an allusion to “winning his spurs,” a medieval colloquialism for achieving knighthood—Clifton vows to sleep in the haunted chamber as he concomitantly declares his disbelief in the existence of ghosts.

It will be in a dream, or, seemingly, a dream vision that Clifton will encounter the apparitions of the chamber. Clifton’s call to Dan [sic] Morpheus, the god of dreams who first appears in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, invokes the trope of ancient and medieval dream visions.³⁸ Having its rooted in revelation literature, the dream vision exists in the intersection between dream-as-narrative and self-conscious revelation and, in turn, functions as a moment where the subterranean reveals the subconscious. Fantastic at its core, a dream vision has the potential to

³⁸ Both *Castle Dismal* and “Rawlins’ Rookery” include multiple examples of medievalism as well as medieval appropriations. Moreover, Simms’s letters and literary criticism indicate a clear interest in medieval dream literature. For further discussion of the taxonomy of dream visions, see *Macrobius’ Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, the canonical text for the taxonomy of dream visions. Macrobius identifies five types of dream visions: *somnium* (enigmatic dream), *visio* (prophetic vision), *oraculum* (oracular dream), *insomnium* (nightmare), and *visum* (the apparation). I am indebted to J. Stephen Russell’s discussion of these forms in his *English Dream Vision: Anatomy of a Form* as well as his recognition that these categories become merged in both classical and medieval dream visions, and, I would argue, are merged in *Castle Dismal*, producing an example of *somnium-insomnium*.

be both transformative and transformational. Yet the meaning of it often remains unclear to both the reader and the dreamer. As Tzvetan Todorov notes, this is where the fantastical resides: “In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know...there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination—and the laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality--but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us” (25).

A dream passage allows us to see the weight of the past, and “dream events serve as substitutions for the depictions of inner lives of characters” (Russell 26), a telling observation given the focus on Clifton’s interiority and, particularly, his subliminal fears. As Sasha Handley and Andrew Smith have noted in *Visions of an Unseen World: Ghost Stories in Eighteenth Century England* and *The Ghost Story, 1840–1920: A Cultural History*, respectively, ghostly apparitions serve as texts to be interpreted, are sites of “disembodied knowledge” (Handley 139), and require “epistemological interrogation” (Smith 3). For Smith, “during the nineteenth century, the ghost story became *the* form in which conventional cultural assumptions about identity politics were challenged by a process of radical disembodiment” (Smith 3). In Simms’s *Castle Dismal*, the ghost functions much like Smith posits, serving as a critical tool in which spectrality reveals ideological and historical constructs related to marriage, selfhood, and gender.

The ghost story of *Castle Dismal* is rooted in a dream vision, a *somnium-insomnium* that Ned Clifton will experience in the purportedly haunted chamber on a day on which he has narratively expounded upon—and simultaneously rationalized—his view of marriage and bachelorhood. Thus, the man who lies down in the bedroom chamber with “massive furniture”

including a “bedstead that was singularly tall, as well as massive, and so very broad that it would have amply sustained, and yielded sleeping room enough to half a dozen moderately-sized men like myself” that had “broad pine rails which spanned the space between the ponderous beams on either side into the morticed sockets of which they fell” (36), overt symbols of Clifton’s perception of the oppressiveness of marriage, is a man rife with anxiety and thus ripe for a psychologically based vision.

The revelatory dream vision Clifton experiences in chapter four as well as his subsequent visions in later chapters is psychological at its core, exposing Clifton’s latent fears of marriage. Yet Clifton’s recounting of this vision is laden rhetorically with objective scientific discourse: he begins by noting the quality of his sleep (“sound and satisfactory”) and that the temperature of the room had changed (“a more than usually severe change in the weather had taken during the night”), seemingly establishing his reliability as a narrator (40). Yet just as he “became gradually conscious of increased facility of visions,” he discerns the dimness of room, senses a religious vapor, notes a glowing moon (or perhaps it is comets or shooting stars, he posits), and finds his eyes drawn naturally to the western window (40).

As he does, his body fails, or, at least, his mind/body’s ability to rely on physiological observations does. His “faculties of sight and thought” become “mutually confounded” as “there was a degree of uncertainty and vagueness about [his] vision which distressed [him],” and into this liminal space where the ability to know, to inquire, and to define becomes “suspended,” the narrator-dreamer perceives “the outline of a human form, which emerged, as it were, from behind a curtain” (42). What Clifton is unable to reconcile—either at a conscious or a subconscious level—is what this vision is. It is only with “increasing steadiness and improved vigilance of vision” on Clifton’s part that he can discern “the intruder to be a woman” (43).

If the gothic expresses that what has been sublimated, then Clifton's reaction articulates what he has most repressed when he exclaims, "A woman! Here was a discovery! What had a woman to do in a bachelor's chamber!" (43). As the figure rises from the window seat, the narrator remains enmeshed in his vision, unable to move his body, able to watch her only from afar. Yet again, his first observations are marked by language of objective discourse—"tolerable clearness," "capacities for observing them closely," "strange examination"—locating both himself and her within a framework of epistemological construction (43). He notes her eye color, her complexion, and her height with dispassion; it is only when his observations move to note the human, the emotional, that Clifton's narrative interiority reveals his disdain for her: "the glance was salacious, with the anxious incertitude natural to unappeased desires, and betokened the activity of passions having all the tendency of sin" (44). As she moves to approach the couch on which he lies, Clifton's subconscious avowal to "start out of bed and punish the intruder for her impertinence" is stymied by his inability to move. He finds himself

perfectly paralyzed by the movement. A cold chill suddenly possessed me. My limbs stiffened; my joints seemed utterly nerveless. I felt all the bitter and humiliating sense of utter incapacity. I could not have raised an arm in my defence [sic]. I could not have lifted a foot in flight: nay I felt that my voice would not have sounded beyond a whisper in the hollow and cold caverns of my throat. I was struck with a sudden apathy which made me motionless; and yet I could feel the pang of the incapacity. My powers of thought seemed to be more active than before. My sense of observation was keen. I resolved—without dread, and in the very mockery of fear—to leap upwards and defy the phantom, whether it were of sight or mind. But my physical man failed to co-operate with the resolve of my mental and moral nature; and I lay cold and passive while she drew nigh, and bending over me looked down into my very eyes. Shudderingly and involuntarily, I closed them. (45-46)

Tellingly, this passage somatically roots the subconscious in the body with Clifton unable to respond to this unwanted invasion in his bedroom. Awestruck, passive, and paralyzed, Clifton's dream-narrator self embodies the subterranean wishes of Clifton's mind: to remain isolated and

apart, both from women and marriage as well as from himself as a sexual being.³⁹

Nonetheless, Clifton finds himself compelled by the female: her appearance igniting his allusion to Anacreon Moore (Thomas Moore)'s early nineteenth-century sensual butterfly poems, lyrics that juxtaposes one's desires for the sensual with one's fears of its temporality.⁴⁰ The female's subsequent disappearance from the room allows the narrator to perceive another figure in the room—one more “alarmingly near” (49). At the foot of his bed sits a figure of a man dressed in his night clothes. Again, Clifton first perceives the physicality of the visitor and from those observations concludes: he is over forty years of age, in his youth he must have been handsome, “his air and features” are that of a “naturally intelligent, thoughtful...expressive of firmness, much simplicity of character and great deliberation” (50). Yet just as our narrator could read the emotional fervor of the woman, he can with the man; he reads a sense of anger, bordering on “ferocity” spilling from this man's essence (50). Concomitantly though, there is blatant despair. As the narrator describes, it was “the look of a man who just surrendered the last and dearest hope in existence. Never was despair more legibly or forcibly marked upon any human countenance” (51).⁴¹

If the body is something to be read and interpreted by others, Clifton can so assuredly repress his fears that he can moderate the haunting's effect on his psyche: allowing no one to

³⁹ It should be noted that this scene immediately follows when one where Clifton is wondering “Could I be that I was affrighted by a phantom of the sight, or one merely of the brain—the conjuration of a diseased mind, or of an intensely excited fancy?” (45). A litany of questions fly through his head, including what if his visitor was “a living sinner...who had been accustomed to make this chamber the theatre of her ill-practices, and was sufficiently audacious to continue them” (45). The sexual overtones—and Clifton's fears of them—are more than apparent.

⁴⁰ I believe Simms' allusion is to Moore's poem “Omens,” which ends with the words “love is scarce worth the repose it will cost.”

⁴¹ Given the parallels in the preface “Rawlins' Rookery” discussed later in this paper and Simms and his own wife's ages at the time of the writing of *Castle Dismal*, it is hard not to see these visionary characters as a fictionalized rendering of William Gilmore Simms and his second wife Chevillette Eliza Roach, whom he married in 1836. Similar to how Frank Ashley acquired Castle Dismal as part of his marriage dowry, Simms acquired the plantation Woodlands, on the outskirts of Charleston, South Carolina, as part of his marriage dowry to Roach.

guess that he too has seen the ghosts other visitors claim to have. Clifton's reasoning about what he has seen/not seen becomes logical at its core as he self-answers the central question "had he dreamed or not?" with a series of forensic enthymemes that prove there is no tangible proof for what he purported to see. Yet, as Clifton acknowledges, "there were some strong arguments in favor of my senses as well" (54), and with just as efficacious a consideration of the counterarguments, it is the persuasive power of the faces he perceived and the passions presented on them derived from "both of their hearts" that makes it "impossible [for Clifton] to divest [himself] of the certainty and naturalness of all [he] had witnessed" (54–55). The dream vision pervades daily life, assaulting his consciousness at uncontrollable intervals. He opines, "my mind wandered from me at frequent periods—my fancy was continually active in presenting to my sight the shows and images which had annoyed me through the night. They seemed to crowd upon me on every hand, from quarters in which I could least apprehend the appearance of such" (58). As the distinction between the imagined and the real collapses, the narrator posits, "they did not seem so much like images and shadows of the mind, as positive and long known personages—people with whom, at a remote period, I had been well acquainted, and in whose fortunes, by some means or other, I was required to feel an interest equally active and permanent" (59). As such, the dream and the dreamer conflate as the dreamer tacitly accepts the vision as real.

As William Van O'Connor, Paula Uruburu, Teresa Goddu and others have written, the power of the grotesque depends upon the presence of reality.⁴² It relies on our knowledge, understanding, and acceptance of literary and social texts—that is, our understanding of literary

⁴² See William Van O'Connor, *The Grotesque: An American Genre and Other Essays* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962); Paula Uruburu, *The Gruesome Doorway: An Analysis of the American Grotesque* (New York: P. Lang, 1987); and Teresa Goddu, *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

conventions and movements, of normal and accepted behaviors and motivations. It must be grounded in the real, in the possible, so that the dread, the terror, the grotesque becomes shocking in its deployment. The gothic's power lies in destabilization, a destabilization that is less about the practice of any particular convention but instead on the employment and rejection of those conventions it disrupts. As readers of *Castle Dismal*, we are asked to attend to the ways in which that destabilization manifests itself, both in the mind and body of the narrator, in the language and structure of the novel, and in the bucolic and grotesque landscapes, all of which become signifiers of gothic disorder. Undeniably, Simms' novel continually walks this divide—images of a bucolic Christmas, familial traditions, and lush landscapes juxtaposed with a sense that “something ails it now, the spot is cursed” (61).

For the narrator himself, this ancestral home is laced with history and redolent of antiquity. While “a noble estate” with “broad fields, numerous acres, and a very proper arrangement of grove and meadow, thicket and opening,” it still possesses a “pervading aspect of antiquity and gloom” (60). The redoubtable trees are “old and massive” as if “the fathers of the forests had survived their young, and were destined to die childless” while “the young shoots—what there were—the shrubs and the undergrowth—which were to constitute the hopes of succeeding generations—were shriveled, stunted, and seemed already in possession of the worm” (61). Again, this is the gothic southern landscape, abandoning and dying. For Ned Clifton, the landscape is emblematic of the past and offers the capacity to remember: under the massive trees one can sit and “wonder at their histories” (64). Towering and majestic, they pre-date America itself and hold, in their very essence, history that which as “dumb chroniclers, they

can tell no stories” (65).⁴³ It is this declaration that will stir the narrator himself to wonder

What scenes, indeed, might not this grove have beheld? What scenes of love and tenderness, of hate and strife? What picturesque adventures of the lonely red hunter! What wild instances of conflict between him and his conqueror! Who had first planted the standard of civilization in this remote spot when it was the frontier?—And what bold dame had first ventured here with her stronger, but scarce firmer husband, to carry with her the domestic gods, and set them up here among these giant oaks and towering sycamores? (65–66).

These forsaken woods have silently witnessed a panorama of narratives, personal, local, and national, ones that haunt the landscape of the South and pervade its present moment.

In the subsequent dream vision iterations, Clifton will return to the haunted chamber with an invigorated desire to re-witness what he now considers a portentous rendering of the past. In fact, he asseverates that he believes he has been “vouchsafed for some special object—that I was to become an agent in some drama of the future, having an intimate connection with some terrible drama of the past” (71). In the second dream vision, Clifton transforms from being a dream-watcher to a dream-participant, tracking the “shadowy outline” of the male apparition into the aforementioned grove (74). His moments of incredulity tempered by his self-declared curiosity, where he stares into “cimmerian darkness,” that is, apocalyptic darkness evocative of the end of the world (78). In the midst of this shadowy grove pervades “a sort of sickly, yellowish vapor” like that of “clouds of incense in a cathedral” (78). A physical urging—and Clifton’s curiosity—compel him farther into the darkness. At this juncture the dreamer-narrator and dreamer-character merge as both await the supernatural revelation to come, and the narration returns to focus on the dreamer-narrator who watches the woman of his first dream reappear, this time alongside a young man. Now voyeur in the forest, the narrator watches unspoken yet

⁴³ Simms often wrote of the interchange between history, literature, and memory. See Sean Busick, *A Sober Desire for History: William Gilmore Simms as Historian* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005).

“unequivocal language . . . which knows no law, and is a custom for itself beyond all control of custom” against the backdrop of decaying and dying oak tree, encumbered by vines, on which the couple leans (81). Yet Clifton’s vision is not just the unbridled outpouring of passion; it is also the unbridled outpouring of grief for on the outskirts of the scene stands the older man from the bedroom, frozen in the moment and racked with “the language of utter woe—of a broken heart” (83).

With the morning’s light, Clifton’s narration normalizes and returns to his authoring of the frame story and not the dream narrative, and once again, Clifton focuses on superimposing the supernatural onto the real. He travels to the grove to search out the site of last night’s vision and although he locates where he, the man, and the couple all stood, the relational distances between all three do not coincide with Clifton’s memory of them. As this instance of physical foregrounding fails, the narrator muses on the inherent deception of that which is fantastical, noting “all things in the enchanted ring are deceptive to the uninitiated. The frightful hag wears, in the sight of Faustus, the image of one sweet object, the only Margaret that his eyes have ever seen; and the frog jumping from her mouth . . . is never once beheld by the deluded victim” (90) and alluding to the perverted distortion that accompanies desire. Once again, Clifton’s forensic logic prevails as he convinces himself he too is under the influence of the phantasmagoric. His search for physical proof—and his inability to find it—leads him to validate the fantastical.

In the vein of another Christmas ghost story, Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, Ned Clifton too receives a third visitation, which brings the sight of that same older man, this time at prayer, filled with tears, and a look of “no peace, no hope, no resignation” as if “all was despair and desolation” (97). Yet again, Clifton’s dream vision takes him outside the room, yet again to the grove, where he watches a horrific scene unfold: he senses a movement that collapses a hefty

limb of the tree that tumbles to the ground, which roars like an earthquake. Clifton stands silently as he watches the man run back to the house, then the woman, wild eyed and inconsolable, and when Clifton inches forward, he sees “nothing but a pale, transparent light, that flickered upon the ground for an instant, like that of a glow worm, and then went suddenly out” (100). In response, he tremulously exclaims (with a “burst of awe”), “God of Heaven! . . . can that be a human soul!” (100).

If Clifton’s ghostly visions allude to a story of the past, then his subsequent bedroom-bound dreams that night are nightmare visions that provide revelatory insight into what happened that night in the grove. In a panoramic series of soundless images, Clifton sees the limb of the tree being rocked, watches the limb yield, sees it crack and then crash to the ground, reverberating over the landscape. His subsequent visions offer a spectrum of scenes in which the older man and his young wife interact, presumably in the days and hours following—sometimes together, sometimes apart; sometimes calm, sometimes agitated.

While it might seem like Simms’s novel has devolved into a sensational novel replete with the most extreme conventions of the genre, the novel returns to its focus on Clifton’s bachelor status, juxtaposing Clifton’s disturbing dreams with his growing affection for Elizabeth Singleton,⁴⁴ fellow guest at Castle Dismal and Mrs. Ashley’s purported “match” for Clifton. As he breakfasts the next morning, he notes Miss Singleton is “growing in [his] esteem” (103). In a multi-faceted conflation, the dream visions, the courting subplot, and a Christmas Day deer hunt merge into multi-layered gendered ritual, where history confronts the present and where the characters are pushed toward an inexorable future.

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Singleton’s surname is significant. Besides its innate symbolism of singleness, Singleton is also the name of the purported author of *Castle Dismal*; George Singleton is identified as the author of the serial in the preface “Rawlins Rookery.” Moreover, the name Singleton is the surname of William Gilmore Simms’s own mother.

The deer hunt, underscored by the narrator's allusion to the pre-modern verse "The Ballad of Chevy Chase," situates the narrative both within the British literary tradition and a British national tradition;⁴⁵ the narrator's reference to "Frank Marion in the days of the Revolution" and observation of "where is the Southern boy, town or country, who cannot make his mark with a bullet, and has not learned to long for the fowling-piece, long before he is able to handle one?" similarly locates the hunt within South Carolina's own history as well as southern concepts of manhood. As Clifton follows the men of the Castle Dismal household to the outlying reaches of the estate, Simms merges the quest for *the hart* with a quest for *the heart*, the search for *a deer* with a quest for *a dear*. Clifton will get separated from the rest of the hunters, losing his way in the Edisto River and nearly drowning in the same locale where the young woman of the visions lost her life.⁴⁶ Tossed to the other shore, he will meander through dense woodlands to arrive, unknowingly, at the forested cabin of an aged man, a man whose appearance favors the forty-year-old man of his vision, and as such, all the narrative strains of *Castle Dismal* unite in the final third of the novel.

Upon crossing the river—and the narration offers a subtle reminder to River Styx here—the narrator finds himself at the borderlands of the wild and the settled, of the irrational and rational, of the mind and the law. The landscape reverberates with the signifiers of the southern landscape, particularly "a corn field and then a cotton field" (118), alluding every so subtly to the economic practices of a slave-bound South. The space, to the narrator, is infinitely unknowable. For within the southern forest, a site that the narrator acknowledges as a "curious and various world [un]to [it]self" (110), he encounters a sleeping gentleman, who sits with a Bible opened to

⁴⁵ See Charles F. Partington, *The British Cyclopaedia of Natural History* (London: Orr & Smith, 1835–1837) for a discussion of the national history of the deer in British culture.

⁴⁶ A 250-mile long river, the Edisto flows from central South Carolina to Edisto, South Carolina, just outside Charleston, South Carolina. The Edisto figures into many of Simms's stories and novels.

the Book of Zechariah, Chapter 4. Tellingly, the Biblical chapter being read details a dream vision in which the human, the flesh, is weak and unable to attend to that which he has seen and heard. The strangeness of the vision leaves the dreamer with the inability to process and articulate that which he has seen, and, in turn, the fourth chapter Zechariah questions: what must we as human do *to know*? This is the central tenet raised by the narrative of *Castle Dismal*: how do we as humans come to *know* (in all of the multitudinous definitions of the word) and, in turn, live?

Clifton will dine with this man, William Potter, whose features “making due allowance for the lapse of years and the effects of time—were those of the man who had made such a conspicuous figure in the spectral visitations to the Haunted Chamber, and the Mysterious Grove of Castle Dismal” (119–120). Upon revealing he is staying at the Ashley family’s manse, Clifton notes a change in the old man’s hue, and when Clifton asks if Potter has resided here his entire life, Potter quickly “became reluctant and almost cold” (127). William Potter’s story will be revealed in the next chapter when Clifton returns to the Ashleys. While the women of the household note Potter’s intellect and gentility, Frank Ashley notes his tragic history. Ashley recounts,

His wife was a very beautiful girl, very young too . . . They lived together but a few years, when, suddenly, in a fit of insanity, she disappeared. The search for her for several weeks was taken in vain; when, one day, a raftsmen, on his way to the city, found her body cast up on a sandbar about fifteen miles blow. To this day, the bank is called “Potter’s Landing.” Previous to this, a younger brother of the poor fellow, a fine hearty blade, rather dissipated perhaps,—was killed by a falling of a tree somewhere in these gardens . . . This, I supposed, is the true reason why the old man never comes here, thought I have asked him a thousand times. (137–138)

In that revelatory moment, Clifton sees “what a volume did this brief narrative bare to me” (138).

In the fourth and final vision of the bedchamber that evening, Clifton watches a story of unrequited love, seeming murder, and apparent suicide unfold in a reenactment that privileges

the spiritual world over the scientific realm. As Clifton notes, “you can not analyze [everything] in the crucible, or estimate by the square and compass” (151). A world exists beyond what is explicable by professors who “believe nothing they cannot see and feel” (152–153). There are instincts and shadows beyond what is known.

Again, Clifton’s visions begins with the woman beckoning him, but this time “she was alone . . . but she was no longer the same appearance . . . passion was no longer in her eye . . . the hand of death was upon them” (156). She sits in front of him “lifting her long hair . . . wringing out from its voluminous masses, the water with which they were surcharged” (157). When Clifton demands, “Say to me how I can serve you. Tell me of your wrongs. Has William Potter—”, the figure evaporates from view. In the morning, Clifton and Frank Ashley head to confront William Potter, and there he reveals “he slew not the wretched woman” (167). Unable to speak further, he asks them to appear tomorrow at the congregation, where upon the pulpit he will reveal of his wife and brother’s infidelity; his brother’s death by a falling tree, which he had rigged to fall, and his wife’s flight into the woods, which subsequently led to her death. Haunted by the presence of what he terms “his victims,” Potter re-sees that evening nightly, the same visions that Clifton has seen. In front of his congregation, Potter pleas for forgiveness and retribution, noting, “I am ready. I am ready. I oppose no resistance. I know that I have to die. The law must take its course. I have offended. I have offended. Minister of God’s vengeance! To you I yield me! I am here! Lead me! Let the executioner come! (191). In a paroxysm of emotion, Potter dies.

If *Castle Dismal* offers an answer to the question of whether there is a way to know, to comprehend all of the complexities of human existence, to understand the rational and the passions of human nature, the totality of the novel suggests it is by reconciling the existence of

these tensions and choosing to live within them. Reverend Potter, the purported male of Clifton's visions, cannot. Passion overrides him, rids him of logic, and precipitates violence and death. Potter's response is sequestration, to dissemble his actions underneath the empty rhetoric of the pulpit; in a rhetorical move similar to Nathaniel Hawthorne's Arthur Dimmesdale,⁴⁷ albeit Simms's novel pre-dates Hawthorne's, Potter *tries* on multiple occasions to confess his wrongdoings to his consciously disbelieving congregation, his final and complete confession occurring just before his death.

In contrast, Clifton's quest has been about acknowledging that moderated affect is a valid component of manhood. Following his return to Castle Dismal after first meeting Potter, Clifton and Elizabeth Singleton find themselves winding their way to that very same grove where the murder occurred. As they sit upon that very same fallen trunk, the two discuss "sensibility" as it relates to both the natural world and human nature. Expressive and passionate, Elizabeth posits that nature—and poetry—offer avenues for the interchange between the ideal and the human and that tempered emotion affords its existence, and Clifton, a man self-isolated by his own valuing of sensibility in a world where manhood is defined by denying its very essence, suddenly perceives "new emotions" trembling "in his heart" (147). Their return to the home, which was "reached without having exchanged a single sentence," signifies an "interchange of sentiment" that will lead Clifton to asseverate "*Quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante*," a Dantean

⁴⁷ A critical essay by Molly Boyd notes the plotline parallels between Simms's *Castle Dismal* and Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. See Boyd, "The Fall of the House of Usher," Simms's *Castle Dismal*, and *The Scarlet Letter*," *Studies in the Novel* 35.2 (2003): 231–242.

allusion to the acknowledgement of love (148),⁴⁸ intimating that one day soon Clifton will end his bachelorhood.

In this way, *Castle Dismal* belies the generic conventions of the ghost story as its ending seemingly reverts to the framework of the romantic tradition found in Simms's romances. In *The Major Fiction of William Gilmore Simms: Cultural Traditions and the Literary Form*, Mary Ann Wimsatt posits that Simms's romances rely on a dialectic structure where "attractive heroines and heroes representing antebellum cultural ideals battle villains representing the anti-ideals that, if successful, would destroy Southern civilization" (38). *Castle Dismal* compromises Simms's traditional deployment of the romance. The hero, Ned Clifton, embodies ideals that run counter to southern antebellum beliefs and practices, yet by the end of the novel, Clifton seemingly reverts to them. In this way, the novel's narrative structure proffers the possibility of cultural collapse but never actualizes it.

Considering the Preface

When defining the hermeneutic circle, Bernhard Radloff writes, "Interpretation moves in a circle. In order to understand the word, the sentence must be understood and vice versa; striving to understand an author's work, we attempt to unfold it sentence by sentence, but the sentences remain opaque unless we have already grasped, by a leap in advance, its rhetorical

⁴⁸ From Dante's *Inferno*, the passage reads: *Noi leggevamo un giorno per diletto / Di Lancialotto, come amor lo strinse; / Soli eravamo e senza alcun sospetto / Per più fiate gli occhi ci sospinse / Quella lettura, e scolorocci il viso; / Ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse./Quando leggemmo il disiato riso / Esser baciato da cotanto amante, / Questi, che mai da me non fia diviso, / La bocca mi baciò tutto tremante. / Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse: / Quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante.*

The translation reads: We were reading one day, to pass the time, / of Lancelot, how love had seized him. / We were alone, and without any suspicion / And time and time again our eyes would meet / over that literature, and our faces paled, / and yet one point alone won us. / When we had read how the desired smile / was kissed by so true a lover, / This one, who never shall be parted from me, / kissed my mouth, all a-tremble. / Gallehault was the book and he who wrote it / That day we read no further.

function in the whole of the work” (550).⁴⁹ Circuitous in nature, critical reading requires recursive reading, reading that returns us to a text’s beginning after we have reached its end as we seek to unpack the author’s craft. We note the narrative strains and literary techniques, consider the text’s cultural and historical contexts, all in an attempt to make meaning. Yet our critical practices are always tempered by what we do not know: the writer’s thoughts, the editorial revisions, the excised lines. The tangible text before us reverberates with the intangible processes that created it.

Textual recovery affords us access into these erasures of memory. In *Dust: The Archive and Cultural Memory*, Carol Steedman reminds us that “the archive is not made up of everything as is human memory . . . but is made from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past.” Archival recovery provides us with access to texts in new ways and in new forms, calling upon us, as we recover them, to re-member, re-mediate, and re-imagine the literary, cultural, historical, legal, and philosophical networks to which they speak. As Raymie E. McKerrow reminds us in his discussion of critical praxis: “*absence* is as important as *presence* in understanding symbolic action” (107). As cultural rhetoricians, we are called upon to reconcile what is present with what has been absented as we seek to piece together a text’s rhetorical work.

This work takes on particular resonance when we consider William Gilmore Simms’s unpublished manuscript fragment “Rawlins’ Rookery,” purportedly intended as a preface to a never-published 1857 second edition of *Castle Dismal*. Believed to have been written between 1842 and 1857, “Rawlins’ Rookery” offers a significant site of inquiry for those interested in the development of American letters, the history of the book in America, antebellum literary

⁴⁹ For further reading on the role of hermeneutics and rhetoric, see Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1950); Michael J. Hyde and Craig R. Smith, “Hermeneutics and Rhetoric: A Seen but Unobserved Relationship” (*Quarterly Journal of Speech* 65 [1979]: 347–363); and Steven Mailloux, “Rhetorical Hermeneutics” (*Critical Inquiry* 11 [1985]: 620–641).

practices, and William Gilmore Simms himself. It is when we place *Castle Dismal* alongside its counterpart “Rawlins’ Rookery”—when we reconcile that which has been present with that which has been absented—that we can grasp a deeper understanding of the cultural, historical, and rhetorical work of both texts.⁵⁰

While southern antebellum literature and William Gilmore Simms may have found themselves barely a footnote in David S. Reynolds’s *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (1989), Reynolds’s identification of a key component of 1830s–1840s humor texts—“a suspension of trust, an unwillingness to permit the reader to repose in any single moral meaning, a conscious strategy of disorientation and assault on the reader’s sensibilities” (442)—may be a valid application to “Rawlins’ Rookery.” Over nine thousand words in length, the intended preface is thematically dense, offering a metanarrative of the writing of *Castle Dismal*, invoking medieval natural philosophy, commenting on the history of the southern periodical, and revealing even more overtly the anti-marriage tract in the novel proper. Yet equally of note is the preface’s stylistic sophistication; the narrative is embedded with multiple texts: from overt epigrams and unattributed allusions to a tri-narrative structure, creating a polyphonic, layered narrative in which narratology becomes both a site of meaning as well as a site of obfuscation.⁵¹ By its very design, “Rawlins’ Rookery” is palimpsestic in nature, continually folding back on itself and referencing itself through both content and structure.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of “Rawlins’ Rookery,” see John M. McCardell, Jr. and Brian K. Fennessy’s critical introduction to *Castle Dismal* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2013) and Brian K. Fennessy, “Master of an Interior World: Masculinity, Sensibility, and William Gilmore Simms” (*The Simms Review* 19 [2011]: 63–82).

⁵¹ For seminal works on narratology, see Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); Monika Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology* (London: Routledge, 2009) and *The Fictions of Language and Languages of Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1993).

In this section, I apply Reynolds's term subversive style—"an indigenous style characterized by weird juxtapositions of incongruous images and rapid shifts in time, place, or perspective" (442)—to "Rawlins' Rookery" and argue that Simms has utilized what I term a southern subversive style in the preface's composition, a grotesque manipulation of the gothic often seen in both southern frontier literature and the border romance and that presages stylistic developments in the later half of the century. The text's subversion lies in the narrative's malleability—its ability to skip to, from, and across narratological boundaries. Additionally, as the drafting of "Rawlins' Rookery" extends over a fifteen-year period, the unpublished preface functions as a marker of Simms's own development as a writer—from a chronicler of historical and gothic romances of the 1830s and 1840s to the composer of frontier fiction and backwoods humor of the 1840s and 1850s.⁵² As such, the preface encourages us to read recursively and unpack the complex hermeneutic circle inherent in both *Castle Dismal* and "Rawlins' Rookery," thereby complicating our understanding of antebellum reading and writing practices.

"Rawlins' Rookery," discovered in William Gilmore Simms's papers by John M. McCardell, Jr., even further complicates one's understanding of *Castle Dismal*, of William Gilmore Simms, and of nineteenth-century antebellum literature.⁵³ Four chapters in length, the intended preface relies on a multiplicity of texts, narrators, and sources, deliberately obscuring our understanding of the text's meaning. What one might term the title page epitomizes this very intertextuality, offering a title, a subtitle, a second subtitle, and an epigraph—and chapter one will present an eight-line poem before one even encounters the first-person narrator of the primary text. Attending to these discrete texts helps situate "Rawlins' Rookery" and, in turn,

⁵² This distinction is not meant to imply a temporal divide in Simms's oeuvre.

⁵³ I am indebted to John M. McCardell, Jr. and his former research assistant Brian Fennessy for providing me with a transcription of "Rawlins' Rookery."

Castle Dismal as texts rooted in multiple literary traditions. The preface takes as its epigraph the lines “Whatsoever we present, we wish it may be thought the dancing of Agrippa’s shadows, who, in the moment they were seen, were of any shape one would conceive . . . We have mixed mirth with counsel, and discipline with delight, thinking it not amiss, in the same garden to sow pot herbs, that we set flowers” from John Lyly’s Elizabethan drama *Campaspe* (1584), critically considered the first romantic drama of the age. Simms’s reliance on Elizabethan drama is well documented,⁵⁴ and here there is an epigraph derived from two distinct—and two thematically significant—moments in Lyly’s drama: one half of the epigraph revealing the conflict of *Campaspe*’s three main characters and, to extend the conflict, of *Castle Dismal*’s three ghostly figures (a love triangle in which the male suitors differ vastly in age and a plot line in which marriage negotiation is paramount) and the other half grounding both the preface and, thus, the novel within the discipline of medieval philosophy. The character Campaspe’s lines specifically reference a dream vision, and that, coupled with her allusion to the medieval humanist philosopher and astrologer Henry Cornelius Agrippa, has clear reverberations given the plotline of *Castle Dismal* and its uses of the dream vision.

Simms follows this epigraph with an eight-line poem entitled “An Editorial Quandary,” penned in the style of Lord Byron’s early nineteenth-century poem *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (circa 1818). Byron is not an unusual choice for Simms given that much of his juvenile and early writings evoke the British Romantics,⁵⁵ and as Matthew C. Brennan acknowledges in *The Poet’s Holy Craft: William Gilmore Simms and the Romantic Verse Tradition*, many of Simms’s

⁵⁴ Again, see C. Hugh Holman, “William Gilmore Simms: Theory and Practice of Historical Fiction” (Diss, U of North Carolina, 1949).

⁵⁵ For a further discussion of Byron’s influence on and importance to Simms’s writing, see James O. Hoge, “Byron’s Influence on the Poetry Of William Gilmore Simms” (*Essays on Literature* 2.1 [1975]: 87–96) and Edd Winfield Parks, *William Gilmore Simms as Literary Critic* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1961).

poems of the 1820s and 1830s have an “unmistakable stamp of *Childe Harold* and *Hebrew Melodies* and confirm . . . Byron’s dominating effect on Simms the apprentice poet” (25). With “An Editorial Quandary,” Simms situates his texts, both “Rawlins’ Rookery” and *Castle Dismal*, within the tradition of, as well as the later nineteenth-century appropriation of, medievalism. (The poem includes legitimate medievalisms—*gramarye*, *adrowse*—and creative renditions of some medieval-like words, reflective of a type of medievalism popular transatlantically in the nineteenth century.) A third-person narrator, the poem’s speaker describes an unnamed author, presumably the author of *Castle Dismal*, as “a pretty chylde of song / That dealt in gramarye and sought his spells / When the moon favoured.” In doing so, the poet’s speaker equates “a pretty chylde of song,” that is, a writer, to a composer of “magic” or “enchantment.”⁵⁶

As we meet the first-person narrator of “Rawlins’ Rookery,” purportedly the editor of the *Magnolia*, we watch him further equate the act of composition with magic, describing that same unidentified writer as a “curious personage . . . [that] has lead you by the witch-claw, shaken in his hand, into his weird properties. He has beguiled you with forbidden philosophies; has played upon your fancies till they have grown phrenic, perhaps, and has ventured, even in the nineteenth century, to inculcate a loving faith in the marvels of the Ninth.” Seemingly each act of narration becomes an act of necromancy, an opportunity to invoke magic, distort reality, and divine unspoken truths.⁵⁷ The two texts are littered with subversive acts of narrative rookery where our sensibilities as readers are continually being assaulted: we encounter author Simms of *Castle Dismal*; fictional author Singleton/Rawlins of “Rawlins’ Rookery”; editor Simms (either the fictional persona created or authorial Simms personified or both) of “Rawlins’ Rookery”; as well

⁵⁶ Etymologically, “gramarye” is from Medieval Latin and means “magic,” “enchantment,” or “spell.”

⁵⁷ My use of the word “necromancy” is purposeful. In Chapter 3 of “Rawlins’ Rookery,” Simms alludes to a subtle linkage between *literateurs* and necromancers.

as Ned Clifton's and Reverend Potter's own moments of narration in *Castle Dismal*. The self-described "ancient narrator" of the preface melds onto and over each of the narrative personas, and it is in he that resides the final act of rookery⁵⁸: it is his house of "eld⁵⁹ and glamour⁶⁰" (the subtitle for the preface) that we read in "Rawlins' Rookery," and it is he that controls the interplay both within the preface and within the novel.

This primary narrator for "Rawlins'" is Simms himself, that is, character Simms the editor, who chronicles his ascension to the position of editor at the *Magnolia*. Mixing fact with fiction throughout his tale, Simms begins by proffering a metanarrative—"a story of *the* story" of *Castle Dismal*. An act of conscious metafiction,⁶¹ this opening assertion carries with it epistemological considerations for, as the narrator acknowledges, "my friends, I have a story of *the* story, which you will permit me, as an ancient Editor, to narrate after mine own fashion." Thus, the editor Simms articulates a primary tenet of both narratology and metafiction: the narrator possesses the agency to mediate the narration and thus both the construction and the reading of the story. In "Rawlins' Rookery," the first person narrator will tell us the story of *the* story: the story of the writing of *Castle Dismal*.

To get to that story might take a while given the sheer amount of texts layered upon texts—an act that clearly evinces author Simms's desire to "narrate after [his] own fashion." The

⁵⁸ Rookery: a nest for rooks; gerund for "to rook or swindle."

⁵⁹ Eld: Anglo Saxon; meaning: "old age."

⁶⁰ Glamour: an early eighteenth-century Scottish variant of "gramarye"; meaning: "magic, enchantment."

⁶¹ See Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction* (London: Routledge, 1984). Waugh defines metafiction as a text that "self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text" (2). While metafiction is commonly found in postmodern texts of the late twentieth century, some critics note its limited use earlier. Lawrence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759), widely read in early and antebellum America, is commonly seen as one of the earliest novelistic renderings of metafiction although some critics might note its origins as earlier than 1759.

first of these entails editor Simms's recounting the founding of the *Magnolia*, for which Simms did serve as editor in the 1840s.⁶² This simultaneously fictional–autobiographical rendering holds import for the study of the history of the book, particularly the history of periodical culture of antebellum America in the years following the economic panic of 1837. The preface then addresses *Castle Dismal*'s own serialization in the journal. In a fictional exchange in which the new editor professes to not know what “Castle Dismal” is (“What castle is that? Where does it lie...In what gloomy region?” he asks his editorial staff), he subsequently situates the novel within the European gothic tradition, specifically Ann Radcliffe's 1794 novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Matthew Lewis's 1796 novel *The Monk*, querying, “Sacred to Acheron and all the Ghosts / That Radcliffe conjured in her ‘Mysteries,’ / ’Mong Alpine forests? Sacred to what groves, / Robb'd by Monk Lewis of their hallowed bones / When owls were overheard on Hecate's tree, / Hard by Gogotha.” In the course of this conversation, Simms recognizes the multiple representations “Castle Dismal” embodies: it is a fictional place, it is “a series of articles,” it is a novel rooted in the gothic tradition, and thus the signifier has no one fixed meaning. Similarly, if there is no one “castle dismal,” there is equally no one author, a pre-Barthesian construct on Simms's part. The declared author of *Castle Dismal* is “G. B. Singleton,” later learned to be a pseudonym for a “Walter Rawlins,”⁶³ but of course it is really the author William Gilmore Simms himself—who is the “editor” of this particular preface—and the list of potential “authors” continues.

⁶² See John Caldwell Guilds, *Simms: A Literary Life* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1992), particularly the sections “The Making of an Author” (1833–1841) and “Gentleman Planter, The Established Years” (1842–1859).

⁶³ Although the characters are vastly different, the character name “Walter Rawlins” is also seen in Simms's 1840 novel *Border Beagles*.

Defining a site of authorship remains a question throughout the preface, and the remainder of the text will center on a “quest” (so termed by editor Simms) to locate the author of the serial, a G. B. Singleton, who has “disappeared” while awaiting his promised payment from the journal. In the subsequent chapters, two members of the editorial board will, separately, journey on a swampland-based odyssey, beginning at “Dryrot,” then on a horse named “Slowfly” on a “tortuous and swampy roads,” to arrive at “the cowshed of the Minerva House” at the edge of “the precincts of Idalia.”⁶⁴ The quest narrative and its framing structure are much less of a ghost story than the one in the novel proper, but a grotesque manipulation of the gothic often seen in southern frontier literature and the border romance yet simultaneously reflective of the burgeoning economies of the 1840s. The questing editorial staff will encounter the rural South and its denizens, and humor will arise from the interchange of misinterpreted communication (as well as the unpaved and muddy locales). In this way, “Rawlins” reveals the emergence of one of Simms’s evolving interests: antebellum southern and/or southwest humor, an interest derived from his own travels in the Southwest and pervasive in writings, including his own, of the 1840s and 1850s. Thus, as noted previously, the unpublished preface functions as a marker of Simms’s own development as a writer—from a chronicler of historical and gothic romances of the 1830s and 1840s to the composer of frontier fiction and backwoods humor of the 1840s and 1850s⁶⁵—and our pairing *Castle Dismal* with its intended companion “Rawlins’ Rookery” bridges this divide.

⁶⁴ In his transcription of “Rawlins’ Rookery,” John McCardell notes that “when Simms returned to the manuscript in some later year, he added a V to almost every reoccurrence of this fictional placename to make it Vidalia. . . . In Greek and Roman mythology, Idalia was a favorite resort of Aphrodite or Venus. . . . There are also plausible connections with Vidalia, GA . . . and Vidalia, LA,” the latter of which Simms was familiar with given his travels to visit his father out west.

⁶⁵ Simms’s first extensive use of backwoods humor may be found in his 1840 novel *Border Beagles*. Interestingly, this story also centers on a quest. Harry Vernon, the civilized hero, is commissioned to search out and pursue a bank thief.

In her study of “Simms and Southwest Humor,” Mary Ann Wimsatt identifies the tropes traditionally used by antebellum southwest humorists—“the contrast of gentleman and backwoodsman, the friction between plantation and rustic types, the aloof, amused, condescending authorial commentary which is sometimes taken to reflect the judgment of the Tidewater upon the unruly frontier” (119)—yet “Rawlins’ Rookery” diverges, albeit subtly, from this expectation by making the encounter one between a city-based publisher who needs a backwoodsman’s knowledge in order to assure his periodical’s financial solvency. As such, the archetypal dichotomy present in Simms’s long fiction (that is, as Wimsatt and others would note, aristocracy/middle class vs. British loyalist; plantation Southerner vs. backwoods criminal) transforms into one reflective of the 1840s, particularly the relationship between antebellum economic development and book culture. This medieval quest of the romance of yore, juxtaposed against the backdrop of southern frontier humor, becomes a marker of incipient materialism, one rooted in the desire for profit and identified by the editor himself as an “*argumentum ad crumenam*” (that is, a fallacious argument to the purse), an acknowledgement perhaps of the very realities of American publishing in the 1840s. As Eric Lupfer notes in “The Business of American Magazines,” late antebellum periodicals found themselves increasingly “vulnerable to vicissitudes of the expanding but highly unstable economy” (250).

As the preface proceeds, Simms embeds fictionalized letters from the readers of *Castle Dismal*, illuminating the growing interactions between the literary audience, the author, and the text, illustrative of the affective dynamic present in burgeoning author-reader relationships. Here, each letter writer seeks his/her own solace, each perceiving the author as a site of inquiry. Ronald Zboray would argue that it would be literature that would seek to assuage the emotional

needs of an increasingly fragmented antebellum society.⁶⁶ In “Rawlins’ Rookery,” we see evidence of this with those interpolated fan letters, some lamenting the loss of the serial *Castle Dismal*; some positing, as they await the revelation of the final chapters, that Reverend Potter’s “sanctity of the cloth is beyond reproach,”⁶⁷ and some even hypothesizing—or perhaps fantasizing—about the author of *Castle Dismal* himself: “Who is he? What has become of him? Is he young—is he—married? Such a love of a man as he must be?”⁶⁸ The desire to know the personal—and the corporeal—aspects of the author reflects Susan S. Williams’s theory of an emerging “cult of personality” in mid- to late-nineteenth century book culture.⁶⁹ Desirous of knowing the interior lives of their authors, readers clamored for the engravings of the authors of *Godey’s Lady Book* and *Graham’s; Homes of American Authors* would be published in 1853 (and would include William Gilmore Simms’s own *Woodlands*); and Sara Willis Parton (Fanny Fern) would include a chapter of fictionalized fan mail in her 1855 publication *Ruth Hall*. So, as Simms observes about the letter writers of *Castle Dismal*, “each in her peculiar way, with an individual curiosity, fifty others of the fair sex, entreat information. Some are prompted by the

⁶⁶ See Ronald Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁶⁷ This response mirrors reactions presented in Chapter 24 of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850).

⁶⁸ For a discussion of reader responses to novel reading, see Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Scott E. Casper, Jeffrey D. Groves, Stephen W. Nissenbaum, and Michael Winship, eds., *The History of the Book in America: Volume 4: The Industrial Book, 1840-1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); William Charvat, *The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley, eds., *The History of the Book in America: Volume 3: An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Barbara Sicherman *Well-Read Lives: How Books Inspired a Generation of American Women* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); and Ronald Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁶⁹ See Susan S. Williams, “Authors and Literary Authorship” in *The History of the Book in America: Volume 4: The Industrial Book, 1840-1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. 90-116).

philosophical, some by esthetical, and others by mere vulgar desires.” To read in the 1850s was to engage within a culture of authorship.

If the archetypical quest follows the trajectory of a series of challenges successfully overcome and the elusive grail captured by the worthy knight, then the editor’s quest in “Rawlins’ Rookery” is an inversion of that very romance. The senior publisher’s journey, described at length in chapter three, becomes one where multiple testimonies, failing memories, and frontier-inspired stereotypes discomfit Mr. P., illuminating the failure of the law and logic in the wilds of the southern grotesque.⁷⁰ In his “inquiries” of the residents of Idalia, “our worthy senior utterly failed of the object of his expedition. He could get no tidings of the missing Mr. Singleton.” If “historically, Southwest humor is a body of writing that was born in the breakdown of hierarchical structures and the (perceived) triumph of egalitarian ideals” (Justus 59), then in “Rawlins,” we see that the privilege of knowledge resides in no one particular class affiliation. The narration offers a litany of witnesses—from Col. Anthony Clough to Bull, Bubby, Bibb, and Bobbin, from the blacksmith to the postmaster—all of whom fail to tell Mr. P exactly who Singleton is. In opposition to the testimonial structure of Simms’s *Martin Faber: The Story of a Criminal* (1833) where forensic discourse becomes a site of beguiling bewitchery that devolves into a destructive manifestation of the southern grotesque, here recounted discourse—and its logical underpinnings—figure as a site of humor. As the narrator states, the postmaster at Idalia “recollected that there had been letters to one Singleton. Nay, he was not sure that it *was* Singleton. It might have been Middleton. Somebody had taken away the letters—whether Singleton or Middleton—had called for them regularly,—up to a certain period.

⁷⁰ See Ed Piacentino, ed., *Southern Frontier Humor: New Approaches* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 2013); John Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentleman: Manhood and Humor in the Old South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009); and James H. Justus, *Fetching the Old Southwest: Humorous Writing from Longstreet to Twain* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004).

He remembered, with some effort, that on one occasion, a negro boy had come with a billet, in a strange hand, containing the name of Singleton, i.e., Singleton or Middleton. But of Singleton, himself, he thanked God he knew nothing.” In Idalia, personal memory as well as personal identity easily slips away.

The final journey, undertaken by editor Simms himself, fails as well. By now, Slowfly is lame, and given the horse was “up to this period, the only hope of travelers making their way from the depot to Idalia,” Simms’s journey seemingly ends before it begins. Here, the structural trappings of the heroic quest devolve into anti-heroic posturing in a moment reminiscent of Washington Irving’s early sketches.⁷¹ The arrival of a Doctor Hilton at the depot will reveal everything Simms needs to know, specifically “that Singleton is [the author’s] *nom de plume*, not his real name . . . The true name is Rawlins—Walter Rawlins—poor fellow!” To locate him is impossible; he, in the vein of that quintessential Irving anti-hero Rip Van Winkle, “has wandered off for a season,” but as Doctor Hilton narrates, “he had good reason for wandering. His home was hardly a grateful one to a person of his mind and sensibilities,” and over a “flagon of whiskey punch,” the doctor promises the editor “Wat’s history.”

In the final chapter of “Rawlins’ Rookery,” the narrative strains of *Castle Dismal* and the preface intertwine; the editor and the doctor travel a bog- and hollow-infested backwoods road and approach “a country home, a small, simple plain sort of dwelling,” a clear juxtaposition to Ned Clifton’s pastoral survey on his journey through a backdrop of green and dense forestlands

⁷¹ Both Piacentino and Wimsatt have identified parallels between Irving’s oeuvre and Simms’s. In “Sleepy Hollow Comes South: Washington Irving’s Influence on Old Southwest Humor,” Piacentino positions Simms’s short story “How Sharp Snaffles Got His Capital and Wife” as a North Carolina mountain-based reappropriation of Irving’s “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.” (See *The Humor of the Old South*, M. Thomas Inge and Edward J. Piacentino, eds. [Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001. 22-35.]). Wimsatt notes Irving’s influences on the early Simms, particularly in Simms’s *The Book of My Lady* (1833), his Spanish novels *The Damsel of Darien* (1839) and *Count Julian* (1845–1846), and his 1856 novel *Charlemont*. (See Wimsatt, “Simms and Irving” [*Mississippi Quarterly* 20 (1966): 25-37.]).

to the edifice of Castle Dismal in the novel proper. There, the narration situates the plantation as a site of transnational history, noting its historical import (“it was a frontier habitation in the wars with the Yemassee . . . had, at other periods, answered the purposes of a dungeon . . . and more than one State prisoner had found secure lodging for a night within its solid walls, while on his way to trial in the city” [16–17]); its southern architecture (“the structure was built, partly of brick and partly of that kind of shellwork which is called tapia and tabby” [17] and “but a single tree stood in front of the dwelling, but this was the magnolia” [18]); and its medieval signifiers (the climbing lichen that “stealing upwards even to the chimney tops” across the moldy bricks conjures up “the image of some grey warrior of the middle ages, clad in rusty mail but with a sprig of holly in his helmet, and a ladies favor pinned to his breast” [17]). Thus, the movement from the outskirts of *Castle Dismal*’s Charleston to the backwoods of “Rawlins’ Rookery”’s Idalia demarks a geographical debunking of traditionally privileged southern spaces. The pastoral landscape has been effaced by a counter-pastoral one, intimating, just as *Castle Dismal*’s narrative does, that the construction of the civilized is always edged by (and with) the wild.

In that small country home, we hear yet another tale within a tale. The doctor tells of a man of words, thoughts, and books, and the modern world was not for him. A sensitive and passionate man, he chose wrongly for a wife—chose “too soon—chose in the blindness of his need—chose from faith rather than knowledge—chose under impulse—and fell victim to the trained cunning of a mere woman.” In this moment, the preface circles back to the novel for *that* is Ned Clifton’s fear, revealed through his thoughts as the first apparition approached him in chapter four; *that* is Reverend Potter’s reality, revealed through his story in chapter sixteen; *that* is perhaps William Gilmore Simms’s story as autobiographical scholarship has only begun to

reveal.⁷² In the figure of Walter Rawlins, we have Simms's true act of metafiction: the creation of a self-reflection, a Romantic-derived writer, one "not of the world, nor with it. He was a dreamer—a man living wholly in a world of his own creation—his ideas forming his associations and appealing to his sympathies," a man searching for "the devoted attachment of at least one truly loving soul, tender like his own," searching and yet ever fearing finding it. This final narrative revelation makes it abundantly clear that both the novel and the preface roots anxiety and, by extension, the gothic in a cultural moment, one bound in locale, that is, the South and in constructions of gender, particularly the construction and performance of manhood. The male writer, thinker, intellectual of the antebellum South finds himself at a crossroads pre-Civil War—seeking to value sentiment yet always recognizing the danger of it, seeking to value sympathy only to realize it too is passing away, seeking a world that does not exist.

In *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Book and Screen* (2002), John Bryant argues that "all works—because of the nature of texts and creativity—are fluid texts. Not only is this fluidity the inherent condition of any written document; it is inherent in the phenomenon of writing itself. . . . [the] condition and phenomenon of textual fluidity is not a theoretical supposition; it is a fact" (1). If our understanding of a text is devoid of the temporal, spatial, authorial, and editorial concerns that generated a particular text in a particular moment, then we fail to see the aggregate nature of that text's materiality. Our constructed understanding of a text's meaning is only that: a construction, one created in the spaces of absence and presence. As literary historians, we must be equally concerned with what has been eradicated as well as what remains. To treat only that which is visible is to do only half of our work.

⁷² See again John M. McCardell, Jr. and Brian K. Fennessy's critical introduction to *Castle Dismal* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2013) and Brian K. Fennessy, "Master of an Interior World: Masculinity, Sensibility, and William Gilmore Simms," (*The Simms Review* 19 [2011]: 63–82).

What do we gain by recovering a never-published preface and placing it alongside its intended counterpart? In the case of these two texts, we glean a richer understanding of antebellum literary practices, of southern literature of the 1830s–1850s, of William Gilmore Simms’s legacy, and of the novel and preface themselves. While scholars such as Nina Baym and Barbara Sicherman have considered the practices of reading vis-à-vis textual structures and reader response,⁷³ the pairing of *Castle Dismal* and “Rawlins’ Rookery” complicates our current understanding of nineteenth-century antebellum literature, be it the gothic, the southern, or southwestern humor. It is our inability to define what “Rawlins’ Rookery” definitively is—is it a metanarrative? a fictionalized autobiography? a medieval quest appropriation? a southern frontier humorous escapade? a grotesque text in its own right? a precursor to a postmodern pastiche?—that most defines it, embodying in its very essence a southern subversive style, one rooted in the time and place of the South and the genres most associated with it. Our reading “Rawlins’ Rookery” alongside *Castle Dismal* epitomizes the very essence of a fluid text as it asks us to read recursively as we seek to uncover the interplay and intertextuality that exists both within and across the texts. For us to then imagine the iterations by which a nineteenth-century reader might have encountered *Castle Dismal*—as a serial, as a novel, and, hypothetically, as a second edition with a preface—calls upon us both to reimagine new paradigms for William Gilmore Simms scholarship and to reexamine how we read and teach antebellum southern literature.

⁷³ See Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984) and Barbara Sicherman, *Well-Read Lives: How Books Inspired a Generation of American Women* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

CHAPTER 4: IN THE SHADOW OF THE SHORE THE SEASCAPES AND LANDSCAPES OF SIMMS'S PIRATE ROMANCE

For the sea is his; he owns it, as Emperors own empires; other seamen having but a right of way through it. Merchant ships are but extension bridges; armed ones but floating forts; even pirates and privateers, though following the sea as highwaymen the road, they but plunder other ships, other fragments of the land like themselves, without seeking to draw their living from the bottomless deep itself.

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851)

In 1837, Boston publisher Charles Ellms published *The Pirates Own Book or Authentic Narratives of the Lives, Exploits, and Executions of Sea Robbers with Historical Sketches of the Joassamee, Spanish, Ladrone, West India, Malay, and Algerine Pirates*. Four hundred and eight pages in length, *The Pirates Own Book* begins with a three-page preface that highlights the narrative strains of the genre, offers a four-page introduction that frames the legal discourse of sea law, and includes twenty-nine chapters of histories and exploits of piracy up and down the eastern coast of the Americas. Feeding into the American public's desire for sensational pirate tales in the early nineteenth century, the text was reprinted in 1841 and 1859.⁷⁴

The prevalence of pirate tales in the early half of the nineteenth century has been well noted. Texts such as John Howison's *The Florida Pirate* (1821), Maturin Murray Ballou's *Fanny Campbell, the Female Pirate Captain, A Tale of the Revolution* (1845) and *Roderick the Rover: or, the Spirit of the Wave* (1847) and early predecessors like Susanna Rowson's *Slaves in Algiers* (1793) and Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive: or the Life and Adventures of Doctor Urdike Underhill: Six Years a Prisoner among the Algerines* (1797) all take pirate culture as

⁷⁴ See Jill B. Gidmark, *Encyclopedia of American Literature of the Sea and Great Lakes* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001).

their central motif. Pirate tales abounded in periodical culture of the time as well. The historical context might justify this literary output: In his essay “Refuge Upon The Sea” in *Early American Literature*, Daniel Williams acknowledges that while many think the late seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries were the pinnacle of pirate culture, in fact “three thousand acts of piracy [were] committed against American ships in the Caribbean [after] the end of the war of 1812” (74). Additionally, historical, legal, and literary scholarship posits that writers of the Elizabethan Age and following deployed the genre of the pirate romance “to discuss the ideological coordinates of oversea adventures and the cultural construction of imperial ambition” (Jowitt *Culture of Piracy* 111).⁷⁵ In fact, pirates often stood in as metonymic representations of cultural anxieties: fears of expansion and concerns of the role of nation beyond the boundaries of its own nationography and changing models of manhood” (Jowitt *Culture of Piracy* 112).

For William Gilmore Simms, a man coming of age in the antebellum South, a man who would, in many ways, become the voice of the South during the cause for the Confederacy, literature would be the primary way by which he would work through regional, cultural, and national anxieties. As a young child, Simms was enamored of the stories of pirates, having been raised on the lore of the Carolina coast; as a professional writer, Simms would utilize the genre of the pirate story to craft a particularly southern story, one that established piracy as inherent to both the land and the sea of the Carolinas and one that recognized the complex ideological and national networks that piracy simultaneously challenged and constructed in the early national and antebellum periods.

⁷⁵ For a discussion of early literary representation of pirates, see Robert G. Dryden, “John Gay's Polly: Unmasking Pirates And Fortune Hunters In The West Indies” (*Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34.4 [2001]: 539–557); Barbara Fuchs, “Faithless Empires: Pirates, Renegadoes, And The English Nation” (*ELH* 67.1 [2000]: 45–69); Carla Gardina Pestana, “Early English Jamaica Without Pirates” (*William & Mary Quarterly* 71.3 [2014]: 321–360), and Gretchen Woertendyke, “John Howison's New Gothic Nationalism And Transatlantic Exchange” (*Early American Literature* 43.2 [2008]: 309–335).

A History of the Pirate Genre

The pirate romance has its roots in English literature of the sixteenth century. In her article “Pirates and Politics in John Barclay’s *Argenis* (1621),” Claire Jowitt notes “the rediscovery of Heliodorus’s *An Aethopian History* in 1526 dramatically changed English romance, emphasizing the importance to the genre of the elements such as shipwrecks, exotic settings, far-flung quests, and pirates” (156). Similarly, Elizabethan poet Philip Sidney’s *New Arcadia* (1590) chronicles the adventures and misdeeds of prince-pirate Pyrocles and, in doing so, “blends generic models, connecting aristocratic and commercial patterns of behavior, showing the ways that adventure and venture are conflated in these frequently heroic, but just as often materialistic figures” (Jowitt 156–157). Seeming to condone piracy—or, at least, representative of the evolving acceptance of pirates and piracy—*New Arcadia* has caused scholars to consider the ways in which the genres of the epic and the romance could function as a means of “achieving English imperial, territorial, and financial ambitions in an expanding world” (157). As Jowitt acknowledges, “where romance often crosses, transgresses, and, in effect, undermines the idea of fixed boundaries, epic explores, constructs, and maintains political, dynastic, and territorial networks and borders” (157). As such, the pirate romance functions as a hybrid genre: one in which the transgression of fixed boundaries stands alongside the simultaneous construction-destruction of territorial networks and borders.

The complex narrative and rhetorical spaces the pirate romance embodies are, in many ways, reflective of unique spatial frontiers of seascape. As William Boelhower notes, the sea “leaves no traces, and has no place, names, towns, or dwelling spaces: it cannot be possessed” (92). It is “fundamentally a space of dispersion, conjunction, distribution, contingency, heterogeneity, and of intersecting and stratified lines and images—in short, a field of strategic

possibilities in which the Ocean order holds all together in a common but highly fluid space” (92–93). Cartographic, historical, and colonial studies all illuminate the difficulties inherent in the negotiation of ocean spaces and complicate our understanding of the representation of them.

A study of imperialistic spaces must recognize that

empires did not cover territory evenly but composed a fabric that was full of holes, stitched together out of pieces, a tangle of strings. Even in its most paradigmatic cases, empire's spaces were interrupted, politically differentiated, and encased in irregular and sometimes undefined borders. Though empires did lay claim to vast stretches of territory, the nature of these claims was tempered by control that was exercised mainly over narrow bands, or corridors, of territory and over enclaves of various sizes and situations. (Benton 700)

This spacelessness finds itself manifested in the complex legal narratives governing maritime law. A study of the connections between legal-political models and seaborne crime, with particular attention to the rhetorical constructs established vis-à-vis legal documents can help illuminate the discursive space of legal discourse. Legislative developments in the eighteenth century, including but not limited to the development of international law, had profound consequences for eighteenth-century maritime law: in particular, the pirate was declared the “enemy of all nations, a *hostis humani generis*, and subject to universal jurisdiction” (Jowitt *The Culture of Piracy* 8).

Yet, legal historian Lauren Benton cautions against the tendency to reduce piracy as the “lawless” in a law-lawless binary. In a comprehensive study of the law and piracy, “Legal Spaces of Empire: Piracy and the Origins of Ocean Regionalism,” Benton argues that to define piracy unequivocally as a lawless action fails to acknowledge the complex (and often contradictory) legal and maritime doctrines of the time.⁷⁶ Legal authority in the international

⁷⁶ For further discussion of the law and piracy as well as the broader legal context of the modern age, see Lauren Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

seas involved intricate, as well as evolving, practices that were dependent on locales, inter-regional practices, and semantics. By the late seventeenth century, sea spaces found themselves as a new and emerging legal space, one reflective of maritime law, common law, and mercantile law (716). Benton also warns of the dangers of “reading” the rhetoric of piracy narrowly, suggesting

the rhetoric sharpened and highlighted legal dualism: Europe possessed law, the rest of the world was lawless. But scholars have occasionally allowed accounts of Europeans' discourse about legal zones to stand in for historical description. From a world historical perspective, there is a great deal of evidence that European law was neither exceptional nor isolated. The discourse of legal dualism—of lawful and lawless zones—coexisted historically both with a pervasive legal pluralism that recognized non-European lands and with a spatially diffuse legal culture that engaged actors from all sides—even ruffians and rogues—and gave rise to novel institutional arrangements. (723)

It is these institutional arrangements that we see Simms, and his counterparts, writing back to in nineteenth-century pirate romances of the Americas, texts where actors from multiple sides and signifiers with multiple meanings find themselves navigating a seascape, as well as a landscape, in which national, cultural, and regional identity are forged against a backdrop of transnational and imperial interests.

The Pirate Romance and William Gilmore Simms

For Simms, the pirate romance was a regional memory, one rooted on the coasts of North and South Carolina and recounted through the tales of Blackbeard, Kidd, and others. As a young child, Simms was told of the lures and legends of southern spaces by his grandmother, to whom Simms himself attributed much of his literary output. In the course of his life, Simms would pen three pirate romances over a twenty-plus year period. In the 1840 and 1850s, he published at least two pirate romances in national periodicals.⁷⁷ His one-page story “The Pirates and the

⁷⁷ Two of Simms's novels, *The Lily and the Totem, or, The Huguenots in Florida* (1850) and *Southward Ho! A Spell of Sunshine* (1854), also incorporate subplots involving pirates in them.

Palatines: The Legend of North Carolina” was published in the *Magnolia* on November 19, 1842, and his four-part serial “The Pirate Hoard: A Long Shore Legend” was published between January 1856 and April 1856 in *Graham’s American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion*. Additionally, archival recovery has proven that Simms was at work on a novel-length pirate romance at the time of his death. This unfinished manuscript, preliminarily titled “The Brothers of the Coast: A Pirate Story” by Simms’s own hand, moves Simms’s interest in the pirate story from the coast of North Carolina to the shores of the Bahamas. Placing Simms’s three pirate texts next to each other shows us a progression in Simms’s deployment of the genre. Both “The Pirate and the Palatines” and “The Pirate Hoard” root piracy in cultural and regional memory, one in which the southern landscape offers a legacy of history by which the southern experience is constructed. In “The Brothers of the Coast,” Simms’s movement to a setting in the gulf South mirrors the circumgulfic concerns of this text—for here, more so than in his early works, the pirate romance becomes a space in which we can better perceive how oceanic commerce and empire building reveal hemispheric, regional, and national concerns—a perspective that takes on even more resonance for Simms as he himself ponders the loss of his region, “the South,” in the years after the Civil War.

For Simms, oceanic spaces were sites by which regional identity could be interrogated. On the surface, his earliest pirate story, the 1842 “The Pirates and the Palatines: A Legend of North Carolina” seemingly mythologizes the settlement of North Carolina by linking a historical event with an annual ghostly apparition—the appearance of “a luminous object, having the exact appearance of a ship of fire” off the North Carolina coastline. In this way, Simms’s rendering sophisticatedly links history to cultural memory, establishing southern identity within a framework for settlement, theft, and piracy.

Simms's tale is rooted in the historical record, centering on a group of German immigrants, the Palatines, who emigrated from the Rhine region of what is now Germany and settled in England in the early part of the eighteenth century.⁷⁸ Poor and primarily of the laboring class, the Palatines became the crux of the House of Commons's debate on immigration and naturalization policies. The Palatines were eventually exiled to rural areas of England and Ireland and established as rural farmers; two groups of Palatines migrated to the New World, with approximately 3,000 immigrating to what would become New York and Pennsylvania and approximately 300 immigrating to the Carolinas, the latter of which settled primarily in what would become New Bern, North Carolina.

Historically, the Palatines are seen as victims of Great Britain's imperial self-interest as perpetuated by the nation's settlement policies. As Vincent H. Todd and Julius Goebel posit in the introduction to their translation of *Christopher Von Graffenried's Account of the Founding of New Bern*, the Palatines' forced immigration to America was partially fostered by Great Britain's willingness to establish the Palatines as a substitute "enemy" for French and native interests in the northeastern territories. As the Ecclesiastical Record directly states, the policy was to "settle them along the Hudson river in the province of New York where they may be useful to this Kingdom, particularly in the production of naval stores and as a frontier against the French and their Indians" (qtd. in von Graffenried 18).⁷⁹ Similarly, the extradition of a small group of

⁷⁸ See Philip Otherness, *Becoming German: The 1709 Palatine Migration to New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Daniel Statt, *Foreigners and Englishmen: The Controversy over Immigration and Population, 1660–1760* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995); and Vincent H. Todd and Julius Goebel's preface to *Christopher Von Graffenried's Account of the Founding of New Bern* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton Printing Co, 1920).

⁷⁹ Original quotation from Eccl. Rec., vol. III, page 178.

Palatines to the southern regions of the Americas seemed to serve the same purpose, specifically the fear of native interests in Virginia and the Carolinas.⁸⁰

Baron Christoph Von Graffenried's historical account of the founding of New Bern serves to further contextualize the Palatine migration. Born in 1661 in Bern, Switzerland, it would be Von Graffenried's reading of John Lawson's *A Voyage to Carolina*⁸¹ along with his friendship with fellow Swiss colonist Franz Ludwig Michel that would catalyze Von Graffenried's decision to immigrate to the Americas. In 1710, he would lead the Palatine expedition to the Carolinas. As he recounts,

At this very time there came over 10,000 souls from Germany to England, all under the name of Palatines, but among them were many Switzers and people brought together from other provinces of Germany. This caused the royal court as well as private individuals much concern and also unspeakable costs, so that they were embarrassed because of these people, and therefore there soon went out an edict by which it was allowed to many persons to take some of these people and care for them, and a good share of them had been sent into the three kingdoms, but partly because of their laziness, partly because of the jealousy of the poor subjects of the country, they did not do so well as it was supposed they would, and so they had begun to send a considerable number of these people to America and the Queen had had great sums distributed for that purpose.

At this juncture different persons of high and of middle rank, to whom my undertaking was known, advised me not to lose so favorable an opportunity; and at the same time gave me good hopes that, if I wished to take a considerable number of these people, the Queen would not only grant me the money for their passage, but in addition, would give me a good contribution for them. These

⁸⁰ Todd and Goebel note that "Even as late as 1733 according to William Byrd, the Indians were a real menace in Virginia; and one of the reasons he gives for encouraging a Swiss colony to settle in his 'Land of Eden' was the protection they would afford against the Indians and the French. Moreover, he preferred for his purpose the honest Swiss to the settlers who were coming in from Pennsylvania" (24). See also William Byrd's discussion of the Palatines in *The Writings of Colonel William Byrd of Westover in Virginia, Esqr.*

⁸¹ John Lawson's *Lawson's History of North Carolina, Containing the Exact Description and Natural History of that Country, Together with the Present State thereof and a Journal of a Thousand Miles Traveled through Several Nations of Indians Giving a Particular Account of Their Customs, Manners, Etc., Etc.* (1714) traces Lawson's journey from Charleston, SC to the mouth of the Santee River and its linked tributaries up to Catawba, NC, then on trails to Hillsboro, NC and across central North Carolina and to the "Pamticough River in North Carolina." Lawson's travelogue was first published in installments as a part of John Stevens's *A New Collection of Voyages and Travels: With Historical Accounts of Discoveries and Conquests of Discoveries and Conquests in all Parts of the World* (1708, 1710, and 1711) and as a stand-alone text in London in 1709 (Harris x–xi). As a German edition was published in 1712 and in 1722, it is likely Von Graffenried encountered the English version.

hopes were realized and the sum reached almost 4,000£ sterling. Besides this, the Queen had granted to the royal council land upon the Potomac River, as much as we immediately needed, and moreover had given strong recommendations to the governor of Virginia. All this with the advantageous promises of the proprietors of Carolina gave to the undertaking a good appearance, and there was as much hope for a fortunate outcome as the beginning seemed good and prosperous. (224)

The journey was not without its misfortunes. As Von Graffenried reports,

This took place in the winter—in January—and then, because of the rough winds and storms, this ship was so driven about that it did not arrive in Virginia until after thirteen weeks. This, along with the salt food to which the people were not accustomed, and the fact that they were so closely confined, contributed very much to the sickness and death of many upon the sea. Others could not restrain their desires when they came to land, drank too much fresh water and overloaded themselves with raw fruit, so that they died of fever, and this colony therefore had half died off before it was well settled. N. B. The one ship which was filled with the best goods and on which those in best circumstances were traveling, had the misfortune, at the mouth of the James River, in sight of an English man-of-war, which however lay at anchor, to be attacked by a bold French privateer and plundered. This is the first misfortune.

After the surviving colony had regained health in Virginia where they were received very kindly, they betook themselves about twenty English miles towards Carolina, all of which, along with the goods cost a great deal. And now when they came into the county of Albemarle to the home of one Colonel Pollock upon the river called Chowan, a member of the council and one of the wealthiest in North Carolina, he provided these people, (but for money or the worth of it) with ships, so that they were conducted through the Sound into the County of Bath upon the River Neuse, with provision for only the most urgent necessity; and there the Surveyor General settled them on a point of land between the Neuse and the Trent River. This place called Chattoka is where the city of New Bern was afterwards founded. (225–226)

It is that plundered ship that becomes Simms's site of interrogation for it is that ship that will appear yearly aflame off the coast of the North Carolina. The physicality of the ship's destruction is linked with piracy, specifically with the theft of the Palatines' material wealth by the stewards of the ship. In his "The Pirates and the Palatines," Simms recounts, "it so happened, however, that the Palatines in question were in better circumstances than was commonly the case with their countrymen. They had money. . . . They had accumulated gold, vessels of silver, goods of various kinds and value—their whole stock which had been

parsimoniously preserved, and carefully concealed—with all the art of a small and selfish community” (32). It is their eventual unveiling of this wealth as they reach the shores of North Carolina for “in the excitement of the occasion and moment they forgot their prudence, and either made an ostentatious exhibition of their wealth, or some words escaped them which led the captain of their vessel to suspect their possession of it” (32). Through chicanery, the captain takes them back out to sea—where he and his seamen massacred the “men, women, and children; the old, the young, the tender and the strong—the young mother, and the poor angel innocent” (32), a lyrical litany that memorializes the lost while it simultaneously effaces the horror of their murders.

Yet Simms’s story is not just a marker of fruitless loss; it is also a narrative reminder of the horrors of sea spaces. With the use of first-person plural narration, Simms’s rendition moves beyond an elegiac invocation and becomes an imaginative space where the reader becomes party to the reimagining of the scene. As such, Simms constructs a narrative in which the positionality of the writer and the reader creates the story. Rejecting the divide between history and fiction, here fiction serves as a tool by which history can be recreated and remembered. He writes:

We may imagine some one or more of the victims awakening under the ill directed knife—awakening to a vain struggle—unkindly alarming those into consciousness who had no strength for conflict. Perhaps a mother may have found strength to rise on her knees imploring mercy for the dear child of her heart and hope, may have been suffered to live sufficiently long to see its death struggle, its wild contortions, in the grasp of the unrelenting assassin. (32)

Simms’s use of the conditional in this passage perhaps intimates the limits of fiction—we may only “imagine” and propose a suppositional “perhaps” as we seek to recreate the historical past. As Simms goes on to write “art may not describe such a scene truly, as imagination can hardly conceive it” (32). Our minds—and the products of our minds and hands—fail in their inability

to recreate the, albeit in this case fictional, real. Our written texts resonate with an always ineffable absence.

Yet the horror of the day is never absented from the Atlantic landscape. Plunder and piracy cross their own normative fictional boundaries when, after removing the treasures from the ship, the seamen set the ship—with its murdered victims—afame so as to hide their crime. Yet in a moment of supernatural intervention, “the ship on fire would not burn! [The] fire would not destroy its object, nor conceal in its smoke, the form which it so completely enveloped! Strange and wondrous spectacle indeed” (32). If the Palatine ship signifies colonization, then its brutal burning speaks to destructive colonization practices and the ravaging perpetuated in such pursuits. The practice haunts the Atlantic—forever visible, forever burning—for the actions have “never, says the tradition, has the penalty of blood been paid. The criminals went free. No justice followed their footsteps. . . . They lived on their ill-gotten spoils, their descendents still enjoy them, and thus it is that the burning ships of the Palatines reappears each year, on the anniversary of that night of crime, on the very spot where it was committed” (32). An image of historical memory, invoked by some supernatural force of justice and retribution, “it burns from stem to stern, from deck to mast, but still unconsumed; and thus it will continue to burn until upon the last descendent of that bloody crew, the ever-avenging Providence shall have consummated the requisite retribution” (32). As such, Simms’s pirate lore becomes a metonymic signifier of the horrors of the Atlantic.

In contrast, Simms’s 1856 serial “The Pirate Hoard” forces us to consider what happens when the site of piracy is no longer on the sea but on the land. Here, the archetypal pirate romance serves solely as a backdrop for a land-bound adventure story, one replete with family feuds, class boundaries, playful chicanery—and a few paranormal ghostly interventions. As

such, “A ‘Long Shore Legend’ is solely that—a legend, albeit a picaresque one—rooted in the landscapes of the Carolinas.

The story begins with a recollection of a cultural memory: “Everyone knows, or ought to know, that among the thousand piratical chiefs that haunted our seas, in the Colonial periods, the scoundrels, par excellence, were Kidd and Blackbeard” (54). Simms would invoke the legend of Blackbeard as well in *Southward Ho!*, where Blackbeard is described as having “particularly affected the coasts of Carolina. The waters over which we now go were the favorite fields of his performance. Harbored among these islands—Bull’s, Dewee’s, Caper’s, Sullivan, Seewee, and others—he lay in close watch for the white sails of commerce. He explored all these bays and harbors, and knew their currents and bearings well, from the cape of Hatteras to that of Florida reef” (*Southward Ho!* 449). As such, southern sea spaces harken to a history of plunder and blackmail in the seas of the Atlantic.

Yet in “The Pirate Hoard,” Simms notes that economic piracy belies oceanic boundaries: for “many of our moral cities, such as New York, Boston, Charleston, and Savannah, furnished customers for these famous free-traders. Sometimes, even, they walked the streets with impunity. Nay, the Colonial governors, in certain cases, not only winked at their offences, but shared largely of the spoil. They were not dainty about the morality of blackmail” (54). Political machinations and economic conspiracies in antebellum America are not that far removed from oceanic plunderings.

As Frederick Burwick and Manushag N. Powell note in *British Pirates in Print and Performance*, the world of piracy and, one can interpolate, the political and economic worlds of the time were the sphere of men, and certainly such a world eschews traditional modes of domesticity and honor. The depiction of females in pirate tales, whether hapless victims or

fellow pirates, asks us to consider the ways in which the gender is deployed in the genre. Does violence against women mark itself sexually and/or economically? Can women collude with pirates and profit from piracy? Is a she-pirate a new model of womanhood? In what ways is womanhood marked? How does a female pirate uproot ideologies of domesticity and womanhood?

Simms, to some extent, inverts the power structure of a patriarchal realm by rooting power in “the girl of Pamplico,” Nancy Hutton. In Simms’s “The Pirate Hoard,” Nancy functions as a reworked cultural myth in her own right. Like Scheherazade of the epic tale *One Thousand and One Nights*, Nancy escapes the death sentence experienced by Blackbeard’s other wives by the power of her voice. Yet Nancy’s strength is not in her ability to weave a narrative. While Scheherazade’s potency lies in her complex (and climax-filled) nightly tales, an act that roots female agency in storytelling and rhetoric, Nancy’s power resides, quite conversely in her vociferous bellowing: “she was a terrible virago, and the savage pirate had learned, in some degree, to tremble himself at her ferocity” (54).⁸² Thus, while Blackbeard traditionally “got rid of his wives, we are to suppose, after some convenyant fashion of his own” (54), Nancy is left to live. Her survival depends on her ability to perform in the ways usually associated with men, and those performances are sartorial as well as the behavioral: “armed to the teeth, and habited like a man, she had stood by his side in battle, never shrinking, never blenching, never yielding a fool, and using broad-sword and carbine as fearlessly, as the best bred ruffian of the crew” (54).

⁸² Nancy’s characterization mirrors Mrs. Van Winkle in Washington Irving’s short story “Rip Van Winkle” (1819). Both are described as viragos; both cause their mates to “tremble.” Simms’s invocation of Washington Irving in his early works is noted elsewhere in this project.

For Simms, piracy affords a liminal space, one where the borders of gender, of conventionality, can be transgressed without repercussion.⁸³

Nancy's role in the narrative will continue to cross boundaries. Following the capture and death of Blackbeard on the coast of Carolina, only she and Matthew Hornsby, captain of the marines of Blackbeard, will survive. It is Nancy's knowledge of where Blackbeard's final treasure is buried that will propel the text further. Despite her knowledge and physicality, Nancy lacks a different kind of power: the power to "command the exclusive approach by sea" (55). As such, she weds her future—literally and figuratively—to "a man and mariner" so as to assure her acquisition of that which she is the rightful heir—the lost treasure. In this moment, Simms's fictional tale of piracy—replete with its own lures and laws—stands in for legislation related to personhood of the time: the necessity of a woman bounding herself to a male for economic survival.

Thus in the character of Nancy, Simms reneges on his early intimations of the potentiality of female power, intimating that it is sea spaces that efface some of the limits of gender.⁸⁴ On the land, female power reverts to traditional modes. What had once been a jubilant and victorious expression of her freedom—drunkenness that once celebrated victorious plunderings—now leads to quarrels "and finally to blows" (55). Thus, inebriation becomes a metaphor for women's lack of agency for as Simms describes "her tastes might have been no serious objection but for the fact that, in very unison, they clashed with [Hornsby's] . . . The new

⁸³ In "Female Pirates and Nationalism in 19th Century American Popular Fiction," Katherine Anderson suggests such subversion "allowed readers to envision a proto-national past in service of contemporary expansionist, or imperialist ideology" (97). In her discussion of *Fanny Campbell, Female Captain: A Tale of the Revolution*, Anderson notes that author Martin Murray Ballou has "imaginatively map[ed] the Revolutionary moment . . . onto the mid-century present in which the U.S. was competing . . . to secure its hemispheric status" (97). Anderson's observation can be grafted onto Simms's three pirate stories.

⁸⁴ A pirate tale in its own right, Unka Eliza Winkfield's *The Female American, or, The Adventures of Unka Eliza Winkfield* (1767) offers an interesting counterpoint in terms of the representation of women outside of societal boundaries.

doctrines of woman's right were unknown in those days; and we are free to say, it is not certainly settled, even in ours, that they can claim more than a *moiety* of the bottle" (55).

It will, as well, be Nancy's attempts to exert her power in a place that denies her power (i.e., the land) that will lead to her death. A verbal quarrel with Hornsby, followed by a physical altercation where "she smote him with heavy hand upon his chops, and he requited her with a buffet, that sent her sprawling upon the floor" (56), will segue into a two-day battle between the two as they cross South Carolina, just south of the Great Pedee River. It will be her tongue—as she pursues Hornsby—that will catalyze his actions. In a description illustrative of her lack of power in the face of violent male retribution, the short staccato tempo of the narrative reveals: "she had no weapons. There were no witnesses. He brained her with a blow of the pistol . . . the skull fractured, and her throat cut from ear to ear" (56). The victimization of women by males in Simms's fictional world is plentiful; we only need look to his earliest novel *Martin Faber* (1833) to note the violence to which Simms's women find themselves subjected. From the coasts of Carolina to the borderlands of the Southwest, landbound spaces and, particularly, open landscapes function as a site of unbridled danger for females. The female protagonists of *Helen Halsey: A Tale of the Borders* (1847); *Confession: or, The Blind Heart* (1856); and *Charlemont: or The Pride of the Village* (1856) all become victims of male force in the southern environs.

Yet perhaps, Simms's text also argues that the male-dominated pursuit of piracy cannot survive on the land—or, perhaps, he means to suggest that piracy, trickery, and blackmail morph into different shapes on American soil. Following the murder of Nancy, Hornsby soon finds himself the prey of a nearby community's vigilante "Hue and Cry" with "a dozen stout fellows" soon "in pursuit of him," forcing Hornsby to burrow himself in the forest, foraging his way in "silence and solitude" (56). When Hornsby finds himself captured by a tribe of Shawnees,

Simms's pirate romance interpolates with the captivity narrative.⁸⁵ In their *An Early and Strong Sympathy: The Indian Writings of William Gilmore Simms* (2003), John Caldwell Guilds and Thomas Hudson trace Simms's vexed historical and literary treatment of native Americans. While both praise Simms's knowledge of native Americans as "unusual" for a layman of his time, Hudson, in particular, critiques Simms's representations of native cultures in his 1830s and 1840s "myths."⁸⁶ Looking to what he terms Simms's "literary myths of place,"⁸⁷ Hudson argues that "there is very little authentic culture in Simms's myths of place" (xliii). Simms's "The Pirate Hoard" functions similarly; here, native American presence is little more than an invocation of native American tropes—with perhaps an ironic inversion of what the U.S. government policies would do to native Americans in the later half of the nineteenth century. Hornsby will find his clothes removed and himself dressed "in their own wild costumes," and "he soon beheld his Christian garments on the back of a stalwart savage, seven feet high" (57). Simms's tale interpolates diverse imaginings of the native experience.

Hornsby can surreptitiously make his escape when his capturers are enveloped in a battle with their enemies on the edge of the forest. Using the natural world as his capturers would, he "walk[s] for miles in running water," covers his tracks, and "buries himself amid a pile of rocks, in the depth of a great thicket" (57). In a significant textual moment, we watch natives be erased from Simms's narrative as Hornsby skulks through the forest, a landscape that historically has

⁸⁵ For work on the captivity narrative, see Michelle Burnham, *Captivity and Sentiment: Cultural Exchange in American Literature, 1682–1861* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997) to start.

⁸⁶ Guilds notes that "between 1826 and 1840, Simms published more than twenty pieces of imaginative literature dealing with Indians—thirteen poems, eight stories, and *The Yemasee* (1835)" (xvi–xvii). Additionally, Simms's *The Wigwam and the Cabin* (1845) and *Reviews in American Literature, History and Fiction* (1845) address native Americans, in six short stories and two essays, respectively (xviii).

⁸⁷ Hudson specifically considers "Logoochie," a myth of south Georgia, and "The Children of the Sun," (which Hudson acknowledges is loosely adapted from William Bartram's *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, and East & West Florida*) and alludes to other of Simms's tales (xli–xlix).

demarked them. In this way, Simms's narrative functions much like the trope Melanie Benson Taylor posits in *Reconstructing the Native South: American Indian Literature and the Lost Cause* (2012) regarding American ideological narratives—"stoic, mystical warriors" who "simply disappear to make way for the 'natural' progress of civilization" (3). Here, the white male character literally erases the native presence in the text—and internalizes the latter's behavioral practices in the process.

For this narrative to progress, Simms must rush through Hornsby's picaresque adventures, which Simms literally does in one sentence: "how he happened upon other Indians; how he fell in and herded with white hunters; how he crossed and recrossed the Appalachian ridge . . . what mishaps he encountered, what dangers he incurred, and what privations he suffered" (57), a recapitulation of popular literature of the time. While the narrator notes, "it would fill an interesting chronicle," he equally notes that it "can claim no place in ours" (57). Eventually, the land shifts to the ocean "in a direct course for the Atlantic seaboard" (57). Yet what cannot be erased is the past—or, at least, the paranormal representation of the past. For as Hornsby makes his way to the waterside, the spectral image of Nancy Hutton appears, "looking precisely as she had done in the moment when he struck his fatal blow" (58). Described as "defiant" and "diabolical," Nancy's apparition "unmanned" Hornsby as he "recoiled" from her appearance and he will "sink down, all in a heap, feeble in every limb as an infant" (58). Infantilized and emasculated, Hornsby finds himself haunted by the vision as it perennially reappears in his mind and in the landscape as he inches his way to delirium.

Nancy's appearance will propel the narrative forward as Hornsby's delirium will lead to malaria, will lead to his being taken in by a planter and his sons, and will lead to Hornsby's illness-induced ravings in which he reveals the details of Blackbeard's death, Nancy's murder,

and the treasure's location (the last revealed in a thirteen-line rhyme). The first installment of the serial ends with the pirate's demise as he, in his imaginings, battles a delusion-based imaginary fiend, with Hornsby's eventual death serving as meting out of justice: punished by "the Fates, at the last, depriving him of the very treasure for which he had sold himself out to the furies" (59).

If this first installment speaks to the demise of pirate culture—all pirates are dead by the closing paragraph of the first part—then the February 1856 installment speaks to the deceptive practices inherent to the land. Here the narrative pivots to another type of economic plunder: one where a "*small* planter," one with only "a few hundred acres of good land, a few slaves, and but slender resources"—takes battle with one of "his more wealthy and aristocratic neighbors," Colonel Holcombe, who in addition to his country property own the island where, according to the doggeral rhyme, the treasure is buried (124).

For the Carr family, the search for treasure is now about righting class differences, affording the grown Carr sons economic advancement, and, perhaps, affording one of them the opportunity to marry into the Holcombe family. The 'pirate treasure' morphs into tangible societal advancement, gold and silver functioning as a means to cross class boundaries. Yet, a concatenation of events will once more prohibit the discovery of the treasure. The Carrs' overzealous search methods cause them to interpret the lines of the poem in the way they wish it to unfold, rather than in the cartological way the lines imply. In the meantime, Doctor Bishop, who held vigil at Hornsby's deathbed, reveals the man's ravings to the Holcombes.

While perhaps this fact—along with the fact that Colonel Holcombe knows that the Carrs' discovering the treasure would mean "no living near him or his sons" (126)—should move the text to its inexorable conclusion: the Carrs and the Holcombes will battle for the

treasure, but the narrative turns first to a lyrical account of the natural world. Evocative of Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Nature" (1833), the narration muses "there is a mysterious affinity between the soul and the elemental world around you" (128). From the wind to the ocean, all of nature combines to enamor and charm human thought. A site of pristine beauty, here "the realm was held still in virgin sovereignty by the mother, Nature," unspoiled by human pursuits or destruction (128). If piracy functions as a symbolic representation of the assault of humans on the seas and as a signifier of empire building, then Simms's melodic musings proffer a pre-Edenic world or, at least, a forest primeval, a landscape pre-civilization and pre-deforestation.

Yet, the lyricism of the land is subject to assault; for the hauntingly poetic lines of chapter seven are harshly undercut by the opening of chapter eight. Concretely, the narrative moves from the Holcombes, who "and then, without a care and in the full enjoyment of youth and health and hope, our young friends rambled along that summer islet, until the last flushes of sunset darkened into twilight and the pensive eyes of the stars began to peep down from every pinnacle in heaven!" to the Carrs, whose "deliberations . . . were followed up by active preparation for the search after the buried treasure. All the next day was consumed in getting their boat ready, and providing pickaxes, spades, grubbing-hoes, and the necessary implements for penetrating the bowels of the earth," the latter bespeaking the destruction of the natural landscape (129).⁸⁸ The site of destruction moves from the pillaging of a ship to the pillaging of the land—an act that "penetrates" the essence of the land, "its virgin soil" (129). The rhetoric of destruction pervades the Carr brothers' discourse—the "smoke house" houses the salt bags that

⁸⁸ Ecocriticism can help unpack this moment further. For works on ecocriticism see William Cronon, *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996); Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Ursula K. Heise, "Ecocriticism and the Transnational Turn in American Studies" (*American Literary History* 20.1–2 [2008]: 381–404); Patrick D. Murphy, *Literature, Nature, and Other: Ecofeminist Critiques* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); and Tom Lynch, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Karla Armbrutser, eds., *The Bioregional Imagination: Literature, Ecology, and Place* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012).

will “injure” some of the intrinsic nature of the silver and the old. This is the world of the material—the father’s desire to carry a Bible with him on the search and offer a prayer before the dig is looked upon with scorn by his son Elias. The scene, as Simms renders it, is one of “greedy enterprise,” derision marking the action taken upon the earth, which, until now, did “not seem to have ever been broken” (130).

Yet the landscape’s mysticism remains. With a little help from the Holcombes, ‘nature’ will frighten the Carrs away from their search. When one of the Carr sons querulously drones, “In the name of the devil, how far shall we have to go?” (131), the landscape seemingly reverberates with a seemingly supernatural sound for “a hollow echo from deep in the woods” declares, “In the name of the devil, deep as hell!” It is this “horrid roar” that will force the exodus of the Carr family and that will make them question if the sound arose from “the bottom of the sea” or from “the woods,” an interesting query given the fact that those are the two locales this text marks as a site of piracy and plunder (131).

Together, the natural world and supernatural world will function as a site of fortune and fate. A luminous, vaporous being will lead the Holcombs forward. They will perceive a “luminous aspect . . . [that] seemed to flicker as they drew nigh” (128). When they pass through it, it seemingly disappears to their sight but, upon further study, it is proven that it remains still as they pass through it. For the young men, this proves the luminary’s origins in nature, for it “shows that there are probably cases, found in absolute laws, about which we might inquire, and for which we might find a solution; but that would not preclude the spiritual agency which may operate through natural agents. The object which [they] see, is to [their] obtuse touch, intangible; it is an exhalation; it is luminous, as if there were a phosphoric basis for it” (128). The landscape becomes linked to chemistry, biology, and electromagnetism; the source for

seemingly supernatural wonder is rooted in the body as well as in the world of the spirit—for, as the text describes, “it belongs to that class of objects which old superstition described as corpse lights, or corpse candles. It was usually beheld in grave-yards or above a grave . . . and the ancient faith regarded it as the soul of the inmate doomed to a certain penance” (128). However, the narrator goes on to note that “in recent times, philosophy has decided that the effect is natural and from natural causes, wholly—a mere chemical result of animal decomposition—lime and phosphorus being the chief agents, and the subtler gases escaping through the pores of the earth” (128).

In a footnote to his own narrative, Simms acknowledges the anachronistic component of this scene, noting that this philosophy belong to nineteenth-century discourse on science, particularly Baron Carl von Reichenbach’s work on the ovid force, which some nineteenth-century natural scientists posited as an animating life force, and intimates that Lord Francis Bacon and Sir Thomas Browne’s early work on natural philosophy might also speak to the source of said material emanations. This textual emendation is an interesting moment of editorial intrusion; the use of the footnote as textual intrusion is uncommon in Simms’s oeuvre. Additionally, the note places Simms’s fiction within a framework of scientific discourse of the century—yet roots the workings (and purposes) of science within a fictional framework. This slight reference becomes little more than a momentary imaginative use of science, a term Sam Halliday employs in his discussion of electricity in nineteenth-century discourse. Halliday notes that literary texts, among others, appropriated scientific principles in “discursive contexts far removed from those in which it was technologically applied, and where science could scarcely demonstrate its actual presence” (2). For Simms, science serves here as little more than a

catalyzing life force for the narrative's plot, that is, the Holcombes' subsequent discovery of the pirate treasure alongside Blackbeard's corpse.

Thus, for this pirate tale, questions of science, settlement, performance, and piracy all disappear, like phosphorus smoke, when the kegs of doubloons, dollars, jewels, and chalices materialize from the coffers of the pirate chest. Material reward affords the chance to escape the shackles of debt, right economic wrongs, and marry well as the Holcombes will. Thus, the pirate hoard here reverses the binary established in "The Pirates and the Palatines," and instead the stolen treasure is restored to those "the most worthy of the precinct," those of "noble works, generous charities, liberal tastes, frank hospitality, and a Christian faith" (351), thereby positioning the pirate tale as a morality tale.

Pirates in the Archive

Archival recovery offers another pirate tale by which to consider Simms's deployment of the genre. Recently published by the University of South Carolina Press,⁸⁹ the incomplete manuscript "The Brothers of the Coast" proffers a more transnational exploration than either "The Pirates and Palatines" or "The Pirate Hoard."

In his critical introduction to the manuscript, Nicholas G. Meriwether contextualizes "The Brothers of the Coast" as a tale that illuminates Simms's intellectual concerns in the years after the close of the Civil War. The end of the war struck Simms hard; his home—and, even more importantly, his personal library⁹⁰—were destroyed during the siege. The Confederacy's loss, which Simms had so closely tied to his personal and professional identity, hit Simms at his core. His writing output decreased dramatically, and the 1860s would see his final published

⁸⁹ "The Brothers of the Coast" may be found in *Pirates & Devils in William Gilmore Simms's Unfinished Postbellum Novels* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2015).

⁹⁰ Simms's plantation home, Woodlands, was burned by Union Army stragglers in 1865. Simms's beloved library, which housed approximately 10,000 volumes, was destroyed.

novels *Joscelyn: A Tale of the Revolution* (1867) and *Voltmeier; or, the Mountain Men* (1868). However, that same decade found Simms engaged in a series of shorter writings, including the uncompleted “The Brothers of the Coast.” In this way, Simms’s admiration of the pirate romance is shown to have extended over twenty years of his writing history, and one can see his plea to Evert Augustus Duyckinck in a letter dated September 1865: “Is it possible to procure me a *History of the Pyrates*, the 2 vol. 8 vo. Edition? This, with all my books, has been destroyed. It gives me great material, which I have long desired to work up into a standard romance of Pirate life and practice” (*Letters* 4:519).⁹¹ As such, we see Simms’s desire to root the pirate romance within—or against—recorded cultural memory.

Simms’s postbellum pirate tale though is equally rooted in historical memory: the story is set in the Bahamas, the site of Christopher Columbus’s arrival to the West Indies.⁹² As Jon Latimer notes in *Buccaneers of the Carribbean: How Piracy Forged an Empire*, Caribbean spaces, including but not limited to the Greater Antilles, the Lesser Antilles, the coasts of South and Central America, and the Bahamas, stood witness to a complex and netted history in which the multinational forces of exploration, empire, and piracy strove for power (1). Its geographical import was forged by its geological origins—its volcanic infrastructure and gulf wind systems constricted its ability to be easily cultivated or navigated. It functioned solely as a holding within the Spanish empire, the nation “wanting them for settlement and not realising [sic] their importance for defence [sic]” (2). When the island holdings became stopping spots on a

⁹¹ In “History, the King’s Image, and the Politics of Utopia: Reading *The Brothers of the Coast*,” Nicholas Meriwether postulates that Simms may be referring to Alex Alexandre Olivier Exquemelin’s *De Americaensche Zee-Roovers*. Originally published in Dutch in 1678, Exquemelin’s pirate lore is considered the standard source for pirate narratives in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

⁹² For further discussion of the link between exploration, empire, and piracy, see Jon Latimer, *Buccaneers of the Caribbean: How Piracy Forged an Empire* and for a discussion of the Bahamas in particular, see Michael Craton, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People: Volume One: From Aboriginal Times to the End of Slavery* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992).

European-southern Americas bullion trade route in the late seventeenth century, the islands found themselves party to a complex network of plunder, piracy, and empire building. Spain's decline in political power in the Caribbean occurred concomitant with the Dutch desire for independence from Spain, Great Britain's struggles with its own British Isles, and France's internal religious-political turmoil of the time,⁹³ and the Dutch, British, and French buccaneers and privateers of the Caribbean afforded these European nations a site of expansion, which would set all three on the path to foreign and colonial domination. Spain's position as a European and Caribbean power would be usurped by England—and a whole new history of empire building and piracy exploits in the Caribbean would begin. Colin Woodard acknowledges in *The Republic of Pirates: Being the True and Surprising Story of the Caribbean Pirates and the Man who Brought them Down* that “at their zenith, [the pirate gangs of the Bahamas] succeeded in severing Britain, France, and Spain from their New World empires, cutting off trade routes, and stifling the supply of slaves to the sugar plantations of America and the West Indies, and disrupting the flow of information between the continents” (4). The seascapes and the landscape of the Bahamas speak to its transient nature: a liminal space of power and powerlessness, of disorder and disruption, a place where authority seemingly rests in a band of ruthless individuals rather than in the constructs of nationhood.

In “The Prospect of Oceanic Studies,” Hester Blum theorizes that sea geographies give rise to hemispheric and transnational frameworks by which to investigate “questions of empire, exchange, translation, and cosmopolitanism” (671). As Blum notes, “hemispheric American studies has sought to challenge traditional definitions of the United States as a self-contained political and cultural entity, working against notions of American exceptionalism by obscuring

⁹³ See Latimer, chapter one and John Lynch, *Spain under the Hapsburgs* (New York: New York University Press, 1981).

the transnational dimensions of cultural and political entity, working against notions of American exceptionalism by observing the transnational dimensions of cultural and political formulations and exchanges in the United States” (670).⁹⁴ Thus, it is on “a failed plantation colony [with] a long-contested [history] of rival imperial powers” (Meriwether 15) that Simms grafts his story of law and lawlessness, trickery and faith, and civilization and barbarianism against a landscape that reverberates with the same. In this way, the fictional world of “The Brothers of the Coast” mirrors the liminal spaces of Simms’s border romances, such as *Guy Rivers* (1834), *Richard Hurdis* (1838), *Border Beagles* (1840), and *Helen Halsey* (1845), where the liminality and lawlessness of border spaces speak to national expansion and the unregulated self.

As Nicholas G. Meriwether acknowledges in “An Unfinished Reconstruction,” “Simms’s grasp of geography was impressive and permeates his work, but maritime themes were never far from his imagination, and nautical motifs and what critics now call terraqueous metaphors populate his postwar letters with particular piquancy” (187). Unlike the landlocked landscapes of Simms’s “The Pirate Hoard” or the haunted seascape of “The Pirates and the Palatines,” Simms’s manuscript invokes a history both within and against the pirate romance tradition. For Simms’s pirate story, this history begins not on a ship or even on the land; instead, we find ourselves beyond the domain of man and ensconced on “the wings of any one of these great white sea birds” that “hover” above the islands (34). Grounded in the use of the subjunctive mood, the sentence asks us as readers to position ourselves above the seascapes and landscapes of the Bahamian islands. It is a vision that will “fill the heart with content” and “enliven and

⁹⁴ For a discussion of oceanic studies and maritime literature, see Hester Blum, *The View from the Masthead: Maritime Imagination and Antebellum Sea Narratives* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008) and Jason Berger, *Antebellum at Sea: Maritime Fantasies in Nineteenth-Century America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012) to start.

unkindle to activity and delight, the languid and unimpressible Fancy” (34). Yet Simms’s rhetoric is not without imperial connotations: we do not just fly atop the bird—rather “we command the wing,” a phrase that signals man’s usurpation of nature (34). Synecdoche aside, it is a description that moves the narrative from grounded space to imaginative space, one in which we can belie the constrictions that biologically define us and intellectually interrogate other ways of being.

This space of being, however, brings with it its own inherent dangers: “the ocean [can] swell with storm and dilate with fury,” an image of the fantastic fury of the storm systems of the southern waterways (34). As the aerial view persists, Simms’s narrative resounds with the language of empire building—“realm,” “region,” “domain,” and “empire” (35) are all used as the second-person narrator takes the now-reader “you” across the seascape. As the panoramic view narrows in on one particular locale; in a moment of mirroring, we telescope onto a vision of “a great white form” that “look[s] very like a sea bird also” (34). Thus, the symbol of empire-building, the sea bird, morphs onto the site of empire building, “the islet of Guanahani, San Salvadaor, or Cat Island, the very spot of the new world that held out a feeble light...to the straining eyes of Christopher Columbus” (35), and in the narrative’s present moment, one perceives that “great bird” we see below, is not an island, is not a reflected image of ourselves atop a sea bird, but instead is “a warship of Europe, filled with European men,” all headed to Providence (36). In one fell swoop, the image of nature is usurped by an image of war, and a colonialist project takes flight. For as the narrative notes, it is this waterway that we find “all the European birds of prey” for here in the Bahamas and the Great Antilles is “the great receptacle for the pirates and discontents of the Old World”—“a powerful fraternity who go by the name of the Brothers of the Coast” (36).

Simms's rendering merges the threat of nature with the threat of mankind, consistently moving from that which evokes the least harm to that which threatens the most: from an eagle to a vulture, a "little hawk" to "the mighty Condor of the Andes" while the ships move from "cutter, slight of build" to "no less than fifty war vessels in a line" (36). These waterways offer safety for no one: the condor can "carry off the fattest ewe of all the flock" and violence threatens at every juncture (36). A setting transnational in design, person, and purpose, here multiple Europeans reign as each struggles to usurp the other. In this "vast amphitheater," the great act of empire building is performed (36). Yet that act is equally a pre-Darwinian animalistic battle for survival where "one powerful European, like some great leviathan, ha[s] outraged the rest of Europe with its excesses," and instinctively as if catalyzed "by common instruct, they all seemed to single her out as a common enemy; and, like a swordfish armed against the whale, lost no opportunity to pierce her sides with their sharp weapons, making up, by their celerity and audacity, for their lack of bulk and armament" (37).

If this is a space where animalistic instincts reign, it is also a site where licentiousness and lawlessness battle for victory—"There was no law in the island. There was no municipality. The population lived mostly in violation of law" (37). Makeshift "garrisons," "fortresses," and "fortification," where the one-time lyrical white bird of the exposition can only survive as a bird of prey (37). Yet it is just as equally a space where national boundaries and landed aristocracies become effaced, where former politicians, banished nobles, and lost souls can recreate themselves. In this way, the Bahamian space functions as a newly forged, new world imagined community where in the midst of a predominantly transient space, permanence and communal identity can be forged. It is in such a space that the King's Image, part tavern-part dwelling, exists. It is a place where community, not individuals, seem to reign, but one that is equally marked by the

specter of empire building: the establishment “has for a sign a circular plate of brass or tin, rudely painted to resemble a large piece of gold coinage,” and despite being “nearly obliterated by exposure to the weather,” the coin resembles “the sign of the kingdom of Spain” (38). The premises is owned by an Englishman believed to have once been a pirate and who now is “a shrewd and moneymaking landlord” (38), and thus, in its essence, the King’s Image embodies the lineage of colonial practices of the century. Indubitably, the New World is equally rooted in a legacy of national and imperialistic concerns, and New World spaces generate new places for profit and machinations.

Equally though, Simms’s “The Brothers of the Coast” proffers a new place of settlement, one established by a coterie of individuals who co-exist on a plane of alternative social order, embodying a new-world counter-construction of government. Simultaneously bound and unbounded, connected and disconnected, legitimate and illegitimate, the denizens of this isle found themselves in a newly created model of power, a surrogate for the real. Here, Simms’s pirates turn from agents of disruption to societal order to individuals that affirm that very order. Stout and stalwart, former pirate/now protagonist Steelcap embodies a new resistance to and participation in a colonial project. The rumors swirl around Steelcap: he is a deposed nobleman, he battled the Turks, he was run out of England for treason. For the newly arrived Danish pirates, Steel Cap’s prowess offers the lure of power and wealth. They can plunder his house—or as they describe it to each other—“his castle” (142). In this way, Steel Cap vicariously substitutes for the aristocracy of Europe, and the act of piracy, of turning on one’s fellow pirates, upends a legacy of social and economic castes, established in Europe and seemingly perpetuated in the Bahamas. As such, “The Brothers of the Coast” adheres to how Alexandra Ganser would describe chorographic narratives of piracy: a “part of the tradition of the ethnographic travel

narrative [that] confirms a continuum between resistance to and participation in the colonial project” (39).

In case one thinks this text is just a battle of the rich versus poor, Simms offers the following reminder: “these men were all pirates, sailing under the diabolic black flag with its ominous and spectral skull, decorated with the usual cross, delineated in human bones” (43). In this now-landlocked pirate tale, economic enterprises on the land substitute for those at sea. The shrewd landlord, Barney Britton’s “profits must now come from care, economy, all the passions and appetites of others rather than any active exercise of his own” (44–45). Disfigured by piracy for he has lost a leg in battle, Barney’s disability speaks rhetorically to his impotency or, at least, his impotency related to his former demonstration of power. The narration observes, “He was still a vigorous fellow, not active but capable to hold his own” (45). His strength now lies in his mental capacity and shrewdness.

Barney’s loss of power is juxtaposed with his wife’s seeming potency: she “was quite as shrewd and a shade or two more shrewdish” (45). Equally though, her power resides in domestic spaces, particularly her culinary expertise, which ranges from rum punch to turtle stew. Thus, Simms’s Bahamian pirate sphere illustrates a domestic piracy where pirates and their mates revert to traditional modes of male-female relationships, where the domestic is aligned with home and hearth, and female agency seemingly aligns with male agency, a representative space uncommon in Simms’s oeuvre. The liminality of the island generates new possibilities for females, beyond the limitations established by European models. Here the woman will wield (and actualize) as much financial prowess as the man. Madame LeVasseur’s home figures as a social and culture center where economic and cultural transactions prevail. Even women of the working class assert their autonomy. Cicily, an orphan of seventeen, is described as “one of

those naturally gifted creatures who grow superior to their circumstances, who grow superior to that which is called education; who gather by absorption; who hear nothing without sifting and solving it, as by a sense of natural chemistry” (45). Here, nature defines one’s essence.

Appropriately, it will be Cicily who will note the Danes’ attempt to steal Steel Cap’s keys so as to pillage his home, and it is she that will run “in the most direct route to the somber dwelling known as the castle of the mysterious Steel Cap” to warn him (51).

Lavishly decorated, Steel Cap’s mansion is less of a reconfigured southern plantation and more of a reappropriation of classic and Elizabethan material culture, its furnishings “the proofs of grace, taste, and art, such as Europe makes it boast and pride” albeit here “in the desolate but lovely world of the Bahamas” (53). The description of Lady Geraldine, Steel Cap’s wife, is replete with Romantic signifiers: she is pale in complexion, with a face perfectly oval in shape, eyes with “deep, keen fiery glance,” and “a nose of Grecian shape” (54). Overall, the effect is “harmonious,” and Simms’s narration acknowledges Geraldine’s resemblance to Zenobia, the Queen of Palmyra, a signifier of colonial female power in its own right. In this way, Geraldine mediates the tensions inherent to plantation and post-plantation cultures. In their introduction to *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts*, Susan V. Donaldson and Anne Goodwyn Jones trace the link between gender construction and southern ideology, theorizing that plantation and post-plantation cultures of the American South both construct and subvert patriarchal order. The performance of southern masculinity and femininity is rooted in domestic spaces, holding particularly resonance in relation to race and class. Donaldson and Jones note that these ideological tensions become made manifest in cultural artifacts, with literary texts expressing “the sites of an ideological failure, of the uncertainties, the ambiguities, and constant changes in seemingly permanent and universal ‘nature’—in short, of the destabilization that constant gender

negotiation implies and constructs” (7). Simms’s post-plantation imaginary both inverts and reconstructs gender binaries of colonization practices and plantation societies by evincing a world where the practices of southern femininity as well as the usurpation of southern femininity occur.

If the pirate romance hinges its critique on colonial practices, the interchange between Lady Geraldine and Steel Cap articulates the divide between the world of the material and the world of ideas. For Geraldine, passion and pleasure guide her actions; for Steel Cap, it is philosophical pursuits. Nicholas G. Meriwether hypothesizes that Simms intended to model Steel Cap on Alexandre Olivier Exquemelin’s fictitious account of Captain Misson.⁹⁵ The text “recounts the story of a French pirate named Misson and his friendship with a Catholic priest, Caraccioli, and the pair’s efforts to found a democratic pirate republic on Madagascar” (Meriwether “Reading Brothers” 13). In chapter five, Misson voices his observations that he “sees nothing but inequalities everywhere” (59). The “cure” he proffers is to “people these thousand islands . . . and bring them together under an authority which not only contemplates their good exclusively, but is conversant in those grand philosophies which shall best shape government for good . . . and here, under the benign influences of nature, we shall accommodate our laws to those of nature, and our empire should be one of unmixed freedom, and unblighted innocence, such as made the fabled happiness of Eden, and constituted the secret of the fabulous Age of Gold” (59). For Steel Cap though, the promises of democratized socialism holds little lure in light of political history and moral failings, noting “how shall we subdue these Brothers of the Coast to meekness, to that gentleness and simplicity of heart which shall bend their hard and iron natures. . . . which is our purpose of aim” (60), an observation undercut by the arrival of

⁹⁵ See Alexandra Olivier Exquemelin’s *History of the Bouccaneers of America* and the pseudonymous *A General History of Pyrates*.

Cicily with the warning that Steel Cap's home is under threat of invasion. The reality may very be the innate evil of humankind.

While the narrative strains of this text never come to fruition—one knows not if Steel Cap's utopian vision will succeed, whether the feminine and the domestic will still be privileged, or whether the islands will simply recreate the political frameworks of the lands from which the pirates fled—"The Brothers of the Coast" offers provocative insight into Simms's life of the mind in the years following the end of the Civil War. As Barbara Ladd writes in *PMLA*, "the present horizon in United States southern studies is the question of how we are to reimagine the or a South or multiple Souths to take full measure of the significance of alternative memories, histories, and modes of cultural expression. Alterity in the southern United States designates not only the submerged voices of women, minorities, and the poor but also colonial, postcolonial, regional, and transnational textualities obscured by cultural nationalism" (1633). While Simms's postbellum pirate rendering may not proffer a complete response to Ladd's call, it is, nonetheless, an early representation of the "submerged voices of women, minorities, and the poor" amidst "colonial, postcolonial, regional, and transnational textualities." At its core, Simms's final pirate tale questions what is man capable of, what is man's inherent nature, what are the practices and the costs of nation building, and how does one live in the aftermath of a failed political philosophy. Spanning a twenty-year period, Simms's pirate tales chronicle regional, national, colonial, and postcolonial histories and establish the eastern coast of the Americas as one haunted by the specters of power and progress, a haunting that permeates the landscapes and seascapes of this new world. Southern seascapes and landscapes, according to Simms, embody a legacy of vexed histories.

CHAPTER 5: IN THE SHADOW OF THE LAW: SIMMS AND THE SENTIMENTAL NOVEL

It is a strange thing, the authority which is accorded to the intervention of a court of the justice by the general opinion of mankind. It clings to the mere formalities of justice and gives the bodily influences to the shadow of the law.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835)

On November 11, 1825, the *Kentucky Gazette* proclaimed,

MURDER! 1,000 DOLLARS REWARD!

Resolved, by the Trustees of the Town of Frankfort, that, feeling a deep regret in common with the citizens of Frankfort, at the melancholy assassination of their late fellow-citizen, COL. SOLOMON P. SHARP, and for the purpose of apprehending the monster who committed the diabolical act, on Sunday night, the 6th [7th] inst, at his own house, they hereby offer a reward of ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS, in Commonwealth's paper, to be paid on the safe delivery in any jail, so that the person may be delivered in any jail, so that the person may be delivered to the officers of Justice in this place.

Daniel Weisiger, Ch'm

G. E. Russell

Thomas Long

James Shannon

James Downing

John Leonard

John Woods

N.B. The murderer was heard to state to Col. Sharp that his name was John A. Covington, and he was observed to be a tall man dressed in dark clothes.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ For a discussion of antebellum media representations of sensational tales, see Isabell Lehuu, *Carnival on the Page: Popular Print Media in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). For a discussion of the antebellum responses to the Sharp-Beauchamp tragedy, see J. Winston Coleman, Jr., *The Beauchamp-Sharp Tragedy: An Episode of Kentucky History during the Middle 1820s* (Frankfort: Roberts Publishing Company, 1950).

With these words, the town trustees of Frankfort, Kentucky announced the cash reward for the capture and imprisonment of the murderer of Solomon P. Sharp, a thirty-eight-year-old attorney and politician, who was scheduled to be named Kentucky's speaker of the House of Representatives the next day. Sharp, his wife, and their three small children as well as Sharp's brother-in-law and a housemate were all at home in the very early morning hours of November 7, 1825 when the suspect knocked at the door, asked for Colonel Sharp, and identified himself as Sharp's acquaintance, John A. Covington. Upon answering the door, Sharp was fatally stabbed with a butcher knife and passed away within minutes.

The brutality of the murder inflamed the town of Frankfort, and John U. Waring, an archenemy of Sharp, was considered the prime suspect. When it was unequivocally proven that Waring was outside the borders of Frankfort that morning, attention turned to a young Kentucky attorney, Jereboam O. Beauchamp. A number of witnesses corroborated having seen Beauchamp in Frankfort the night of the sixth and, additionally, had observed him leaving hastily on the morning of the seventh. Collective memory then recollected that Beauchamp was now married to Ann Cook, a woman who had once accused Sharp of seducing her, impregnating her, and deserting her. Suddenly, the murder of Solomon Sharp transformed into a story of unwonted seduction and requited revenge.

The Sharp-Beauchamp story commanded the attention of antebellum America. As the *Christian Register* from December 3, 1825 describes, "the gloom which this event has spread throughout society is of the deepest cast. The murder of a man in his own house, at the dead hour of night, almost in the presence of his wife, and warm from her embraces, with his children sleeping around him, while extending the rites of hospitality to his assassin is a blow to all that is sacred in social and civil life" ("The Murder of S. P. Sharp" 191). Fictional and nonfictional

accounts of the tale abounded, from a folk ballad entitled “Colonel Sharp” to Edgar Allan Poe’s unfinished 1835 drama *Politian, A Tragedy*⁹⁷ to William Gilmore Simms’s two-volume *Beauchampe; or, The Kentucky Tragedy, A Tale of Passion* (1842). In his introduction to *The Kentucky Tragedy: A Story of Conflict and Change in Antebellum America*, Dickson D. Bruce, Jr. posits that the number of literary adaptations of Sharp-Beauchamp tragedy spoke not only to the compelling narrative of the drama but also to the ways in which the tragedy evinced antebellum anxieties. The 1820s found America in a world laden with moral and spiritual uncertainty, consumed with questions of social and individual identity. Faced with unheralded technological, economic, social, and cultural change, antebellum Americans encountered a dramatically different world than the generation previous. Thus, as Bruce suggests, the prevalence of adaptations of the Kentucky tragedy spoke to a desire to contain the horror of the saga while, concomitantly, intimating what that horror signified: the incipient dangers of a new physical, moral, and intellectual landscape. Literary responses attempted to do what the tenets of old could not: contain the personal and cultural anxieties of the present.

From the early national period, the novel was used to assuage the populace’s anxieties. As Nina Baym notes in *Novels, Readers, and Reviews: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America*, novel reading afforded a way for “the masses to determine the shape of the culture” (28). In her work on early national fiction, Karen A. Weyler notes that the post-Revolutionary populace was “rife for sentimental discourse, as novelists used sentimentality as a modality to depict and work through cultural anxieties” (15–16). Looking to Walter L. Reed’s definition of the novel as “the literary genre which gives the greatest weight to those human fictions—

⁹⁷ See Edgar Allan Poe, *Politian; An Unfinished Tragedy* (1835. Richmond: The Edgar Allan Poe Shrine, 1923). *Politian* was originally published in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in December 1835 and January 1836. Poe sets his rendition of the tragedy in sixteenth-century Rome.

economic, political, psychological, social, scientific, historical, even mythical—which lie beyond the boundaries of the prevailing canon” (5), Weyler aptly observes that “fiction as a genre explores and critiques those other ‘fictions’ and systems of belief by which we structure and organize our social reality” (12). Thus, to read a novel is to encounter—and to negotiate—a complex and vexed network of ideological systems, and the adaptations of the Sharp-Beauchamp tragedy may be read as texts in which sexuality and seduction function as metonymic signifiers of antebellum economic, sexual, and legal crises.

Viewing Simms’s adaptation of the Kentucky tragedy takes on particular resonance given the range of nonfictional and fictional accounts that were published in the seventeen years between the murder and Simms’s publication of the two-volume *Beauchampe; or, the Kentucky Tragedy, A Tale of Passion* (1842). Between 1825 and 1827, four primary sources were released to the public: *The Confession of Jereboam O. Beauchamp who was executed at Frankfort, Ky., on the 7th of July, 1826, for the murder of Col. Solomon P. Sharp, a member of the legislature, and late attorney general of Ky*; *Letters of Ann Cook, late Mrs. Beauchamp, to her Friend in Maryland: Containing Short History of the Life of that Remarkable Woman; A Report on the Trial of Jereboam O. Beauchamp before the Franklin Circuit Court, in May, 1826*; and *Vindication of the Character of the Late Col. Solomon P. Sharp, from the Calumnies Published Against Him Since His Murder*.⁹⁸ Given the proliferation of source material, each subsequent rendering of the Sharp-Beauchamp tragedy functions as a palimpsest, each text inscribed by the event itself as well as the multiple recountings of the event. In this way, adaptations of the

⁹⁸ *A Report on the Trial of Jereboam O. Beauchamp Before the Franklin Circuit Court, in May, 1826* is a transcript of the court proceedings published by Alfred G. Hodges in Frankfort, Kentucky in 1826. It is a compilation of the trial notes of court reporters J. G. Dana and R. S. Thomas. *Vindication of the Character of the Late Col. Solomon P. Sharp, from the Calumnies Published Against Him Since His Murder* is a vindication statement published by Amos Kendell and Company in Frankfort, Kentucky in 1827. Written by Sharp’s brother, Leander J. Sharp, the text seeks to rebut the narrative perpetuated by Beauchamp’s *Confession* and reinstate Solomon Sharp’s reputation.

Kentucky tragedy reflect Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's argument in *The Politics and the Poetics of Transgression*: that discursive spaces are "never completely independent of social place and the formation of new kinds of [rhetoric] can be traced through the emergence of new public sites of discourse and the transformation of old ones" (80). Michel Foucault would agree. Observing that a seemingly discrete text is, in reality, only one node within a network of a discourse system, Foucault writes,

the frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network. And this network of references is not the same in the case of a mathematical treatise, a textual commentary, a historical account, and an episode in a novel cycle; the unity of the book, even in the sense of a group of relations, cannot be regarded as identical in each case. The book is not simply the object that one holds in one's hands . . . it indicates itself, constructs itself, only on the basis of a complex field of discourse. (23)

Historically, adaptation studies have focused on how verily an adaptation adheres to its original source, yet more recent scholarship has focused on the ways in which individual adaptations speak to a broader cultural framework.⁹⁹ Critics would argue that an adaptation speaks just as much about the time frame in which it is created as it does about the time and place of the original source material. As such, adaptations embody the process of genre creation and recreation. As Linda Hutcheon notes in *A Theory of Adaptation*, adaptations invoke both the "process of creation" and the "process of reception" (8). While "the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation," adaptation also speaks to textual memory: "we experience adaptations (*as adaptations*) as palimpsests through our memory" of their texts of origin (8). Thus, to read William Gilmore Simms's 1842 adaptation of the Sharp-Beauchamp story is to be cognizant of the texts upon which Simms is writing; moreover,

⁹⁹ See Nassim W. Balistrini, ed., *Adaptation in American and Transatlantic Studies: Perspectives on Teaching and Research* (Heidelberg: Winter 2011).

Simms's revisions in the 1856 Redfield editions in which he split the two-volume novel into two separate novels as well as revised and expanded the content of both texts further complicate the history of this fluid text and the re-membering of the Sharp-Beauchamp murder. Viewed as more comprehensive accounts of the saga, the 1856 Redfield editions illuminate two specific rhetorical considerations: (1.) what does the overt separation of the two texts mean for Simms's deployment of the tragedy? and (2.) how does that same separation more clearly denote the structural, stylistic, and thematic differences across the two novels? When read in tandem, the 1856 novels prove that Simms's adaptations exist at the crossroads of sentimental and the legal, proffering a world where sentimental yearnings and naturalistic urges battle for dominance. In particular, the structure and content of the paired texts pointedly reveal Simms's juxtaposition of the generic conventions of the sentimental novel with the thematic concerns of the purportedly autobiographical epistolary confession, *Letters of Ann Cook, late Mrs. Beauchamp, to her Friend in Maryland: Containing Short History of the Life of that Remarkable Woman* (1826). As such, Simms's novels re-mediate the genre of the sentimental against the framework of the law.

Scandal and Sentiment: An Early American Tragedy

The Kennedy tragedy refers to the events surrounding the murder of Colonel Solomon P. Sharp by the twenty-three-year-old Jereboam O. Beauchamp. At its core, the tragedy was a seduction novel come to life. Sharp held a pre-eminent position in early nineteenth-century Kentucky, and at the time of his death was the attorney general of Kentucky. A landowner and an attorney, Sharp entered the state legislature in 1812, and he married into a prominent Frankfort family in 1818. In 1820, it was purported that Sharp had seduced one Ann Cook, who later gave birth to a stillborn child, and then abandoned her. Cook, a native of Virginia, had relocated to Kentucky with her mother, father, and brothers. Following the death of her father,

Cook and her mother resided on their estate outside of Bowling Green, Kentucky where she encountered the rising politician Sharp. In the summer following the death of Cook's child, Beauchamp, a young attorney and native of Bowling Green, returned to the county, where he met and wooed Cook. By 1824, the two were married under the agreement that Beauchamp would avenge her honor. In 1825, Sharp ran for election to the Kentucky legislature, and rumors of Cook's seduction by Sharp resurfaced. Sharp would win the election, and on the night before he was to be elected to the House of Representatives, he would be killed by Beauchamp. Beauchamp would be arrested within the week, be brought to trial, and then be sentenced to death by hanging. It would be in his jail cell that he would pen his apologia *The Confession of Jereboam O. Beauchamp*, which would be released following his death.

Yet the Sharp-Beauchamp tragedy does not end so neatly. On the night before Sharp was to be sent to the gallows, his wife Ann Cook was given permission to dwell in his jail cell for the evening. Unbeknownst to the guards, Cook had secreted a vial of laudanum into the cell. Both she and Beauchamp drank from it, yet the drug proved to be ineffective and both survived. The next morning, Cook revealed a knife she had also hidden, again as an attempt to kill both herself and Beauchamp. Beauchamp survived the stabbing, but Cook fatally stabbed herself. Beauchamp was hanged later that morning, and the two were buried under one gravestone.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ The epitaph on the gravestone is a poem Cook wrote: "Entomb'd below in each other's arms, / The husband and the Wife repose, / Safe from life's never ending storms, And safe from all their cruel foes. / A child of evil fate she lived, / A villain's wiles her peace had crossed; / The husband of her heart revived / The happiness she long had lost. / He heard her tale of matchless woe, / And burning for revenge he rose, / And laid her base seducer low, / And struck dismay to Virtue's foes / Reader! if Honor's generous blood / E'er warmed thy breast, here drop a tear, / And let the sympathetic flood / Deep in thy mind its traces bear. / A father or a mother thou, / Thy daughter's view in grief's despair, / Then turn and see the villain low, / And here let fall the grateful tear. / A brother or a sister thou! / Dishonor'd see this sister dear; / Then turn and see the villain low, / And here let fall the grateful tear. / Daughter of virtue! moist thy tear, / This tomb of love and honor claim; / For thy defence the husband here / Laid down in youth his life and fame. / His wife disdained a life forlorn, / Without her heart's lov'd honor'd lord; / Then, reader, here their fortunes mourn, / Who for their love, their life blood poured."

Sourcing the Story

From the 1820s, the Sharp-Beauchamp story ignited a maelstrom of public opinion and public response. Early newspaper accounts privileged Sharp's solid reputation and irreparable loss. The periodical the *Frankfort Commentator* lamented "the death of a distinguished and highly respected fellow citizen, fallen by the hand of an assassin, murdered with circumstances of excessive atrocity and unrelenting cruelty" on November 12, 1825 (qtd. in Zanger 4), and upon the execution of Jereboam O. Beauchamp, the broadsheet *The Spirit of '76* proclaimed, "Thus has terminated this horrid tragedy. And if we regard it from the assassination of Col. Sharp, until the execution of Beauchamp, it presents a picture of the most dreadful character; one which has rarely, if ever, been paralleled in the civilized world, and which has developed the deepest guilt and the most cruel injustice" (qtd. in Zanger 11).

The subsequent renderings of the Sharp-Beauchamp tragedy offer a polyphony of accounts, from the perpetrators to the victims, with each text attempting to claim authority over the series of events. Accompanied by a prefatory statement of authenticity by John H. Hanna, clerk of the state of Kentucky, Beauchamp's own *The Confession of Jeroboam O. Beauchamp* was published following his execution. In particular, the narrative seeks to exculpate Ann Cook, depicting her as an innocent victim of the hands of the cold-hearted seducer Solomon Sharp. As Jeroboam O. Beauchamp writes in his confession, "This narrative is pregnant with views of human character and means of instruction. It is a beacon light to warn us from the indulgence of passion, to teach us to shun the path of vice, and to show us to what inevitable crime and woe the first guilty step leads" (122). Matthew G. Schoenbachler argues that Beauchamp's "confession" is marked by the performative nature of the sentimental, evidenced when Beauchamp positions himself as a Byronic hero (91–92), one effecting "honorable, if reckless, vengeance exacted in

the defense of an orphan's honor" (209). Yet, as Schoenbachler further identifies, the confession's sheer popularity perpetuated the narrative's regeneration and redistribution so much that "in time [the narrative] becoming far more detailed and elaborate and even further removed from reality" (210).

Ann Cook's subsequent treatise *Letters of Ann Cook, late Mrs. Beauchamp, to her Friend in Maryland: Containing Short History of the Life of that Remarkable Woman*, published in 1826, extended the Sharp-Beauchamp story further. Although contemporary scholarship has not been able to identify the text's author definitely, most historians now agree that the text is a fictional construct. However, *Letters of Ann Cook* was read as a true-to-life account throughout the nineteenth century, with the genre's form, an epistolary novel of seduction, according further authority to the story. The text begins with a preface by the husband of Cook's friend Ellen who acknowledges that Cook's story signifies the dangers of sentiment. After asserting the volume's authenticity, the gentleman frames the story to come as an "awful tragedy" and notes that the saga will "exhibit the dreadful effects of seduction and treachery, and the consequences which flow from the first fatal aberration from the paths of virtue and innocence" (Beauchamp *Letters* 4). The preface describes Cook as one who "seems to have been permitted to follow too much the bent of a mind naturally vigorous, and tinged with romantic heroism, and to give too great a range to her sensibilities and feelings, rendering morbid by solitude, and acute by indulgence" (Beauchamp *Letters* 5). Yet, according to the narrator, the responsibility for the seduction must rest thoroughly on the shoulders of Sharp—to him one should attribute "the original cause, the odium, and the censure of society" (Beauchamp *Letters* 5).

Following the preface is an epistolary collection in which Ann Cook Beauchamp speaks to her penchant for the emotional and her love of the wild. Her affect, she notes, is aligned with

the “sublime and savage features of nature” (10). Equally though, she is a reader of novels and recounts how “in reading the romances which fell in our way, how often have I wished to be the heroine, to be places in a situation where I could feel distinguished and appreciated” (10). Ann Cook’s letters reveal an obsessive proclivity for the sentimental heroine. When writing in reference to Alexander Pope’s “The Epistle of Heloisa to Abeillard,”¹⁰¹ she describes the character of Heloisa “as most analogous to my own—her ardent and heroic devotion to her lover excited my enthusiasm, and I felt as if I could have made the same sacrifice she made, had I had such an object to doat on . . . I think if I could love as ardently, and sacrifice myself as readily as she did, had I an object worthy of my attention” (14–16), and in reference to the dramatic heroine Elvira of the tragedy of Pizarro,¹⁰² she writes “There was something in the mind of that woman that always struck me as extremely noble and elevated. She was wrong, deeply wronged, by the man on whom she had placed her affections. He was a monster, but she loved him . . . but he deceived, betrayed, and ruined her, and she could have then stabbed him in the heart . . . Ellen! *I would do the same*” (16). For Ann Cook, love and romance embody the extremes of human emotions; to demonstrate less is to fail at “the dignity and perfection of the human condition” (20).

As the letters progress, Cook details her father’s death and her family’s relocation to Kentucky, where she encounters a Col. S—, “a gentleman with whose appearance I was most forcibly struck. Effusive in her description, Cook recounts she “found him singularly fascinating

¹⁰¹ “The Epistle of Heloisa to Abeillard” (1717) is a poem by Alexander Pope. The poem chronicles Heloisa’s (Eloisa) secret affair with her teacher and their subsequent separated and monastic lives. Interestingly, the poem also comments on the permanency (as well as the impermanency) of memory: “How happy is the blameless vestal’s lot! / The world forgetting, by the world forgot. / Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind!”

¹⁰² Here, Cook is referencing Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s drama *Pizarro: A Tragedy in Five Acts* (1799). Elvira is the mistress of Pizarro, the leader of the Spaniards. As Jane Moody writes in *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, and Society, 1790–1840*, Elvira signifies “the emerging inchoate identity of a woman striving to articulate some form of public place in the world” (270).

. . . the most fluent and intelligent man I have ever been acquainted with” (47). Isolated from her counterparts, who are “now settled into life . . . [with] a more staid and regular course of thought . . . [their] wildness softened down into a calm and matronly deportment” (45), Cook “madly doat on him” (55). Her letters are replete with fanciful yearnings for a future with him and ostensibly supernatural visions that warn of the horrors to come.¹⁰³ Her “yielding to him” upon his return is followed by a series of apologies to her friend Ellen, acknowledging that she “has acted wrong” (57). Abandoned by the gentleman soon after, Cook laments her fate and rails against societal norms that vilify her actions while “his senses . . . and actions are the glory of the world” (61–62). The subsequent loss of her child from that union, six months after the child’s birth, fills Cook with “indignation and abhorrence” as she “dwel[ls] upon the cold blooded treachery and cruelty of that man unceasingly” (74). It “had become a part of my nature, I could not eradicate it from my heart,” she recounts (74). When Beauchamp offers her his hand, she willingly agrees despite knowing that marriage cannot “erase the deep and indelible stain on [her] character, or make a malignant and envious world forget the folly or misfortune of a poor erring woman” (79).

In the final letter, Cook poignantly muses on “who can look forward into the hidden secrets of futurity, and behold the career that lies before them?” (81). Cook’s texts absent much of Beauchamp’s murder of Sharp and his subsequent trial, only noting that “calumny will be busy, and a cold-blooded and unfeeling world will, perhaps, cast upon our memories its odium and detestation” (83) and acknowledging that she herself “would have put an end to the monster with my own hand, but my dear husband imbibed my feelings, and was roused to a pitch of

¹⁰³ In Letter X, for example, Cook describes a series of dreams she experienced during a time that Sharp was absent from her company. In one terrifying vision, she hears a voice “that rent the firmament, cry, *you shall perish*” (56). She then envisions rushing after him with a dagger “glittering in her hand” and killing him.

madness” (84). Noting that her husband will die for the crime while she is acquitted and permitted to “live as a special favor,” Cook forcefully asserts that “they cannot, however, take from me the power of self-destruction,” notes that she will sleep that night “in the arms of her avenger,” and includes the epigraph she wishes engraved on their tombstone (86). Framing herself as yet one other woman who refused to outlast the death of her counterpart—Cook writes, “An Aria and a Cleopatra refused to survive the fate of a husband who had done much less for them than mine has done for me” (88)—Cook vows to requite her husband for what he has done for her. She exclaims, “He has nobly, generously, surrendered all hopes in this world on my account; sacrificed life, fame, every thing, that justice might be done me; and can I leave him to perish alone? Impossible!” (88). With that, the letter ends, and the Beauchamps are consigned to their fates.

Representations of Ann Cook hold import for our considerations of the interchange between the sentimental, the domestic, the feminine, and the legal in antebellum America. Matthew G. Schoenbachler acknowledges that representations of Cook were viewed through the prism of George Lillo’s *The London Merchant, or The History of George Barnwell*,¹⁰⁴ a Restoration drama that applied the tropes of the tragedy to the emerging middle class. In the play, George Barnwell, an apprentice to successful merchant, is seduced by an older, manipulative female. In the concatenation of events that follow, Barnwell embezzles from his employer, hoping to please his lover Millwood. At Millwood’s provocation, Barnwell will murder his wealthy uncle only later to be accused of murder by Millwood. The denouement of

¹⁰⁴ See *Murder & Madness*, chapter 9. In this chapter, Schoenbachler traces the “memory and invention of a tragedy” (209). Of particular note is Schoenbachler’s brief discussion of George Lillo’s *The London Merchant, or The History of George Barnwell*. Schoenbachler quotes an August 2, 1826 letter from Secretary of State Henry Clay to Louisiana state senator Josiah Stoddard Johnston, seemingly the first mention that links the Sharp-Beauchamp saga with Lillo’s tragedy. Clay writes, “You will have seen the tragical end of Beauchamp and his unfortunate wife. We live in an age of romance. Ask Mrs. Johnston if the story might not be wrought up into a fine popular tragedy—one similar to Geo. Barnwell” (214).

the tragedy finds Barnwell arrested and both he and Millwood sentenced to the gallows. As Schoenbachler notes, “at the heart of the tale is a warning that the debasing of a female leads to moral havoc—that once woman, the sentinel of mercy is corrupted, the fabric of decency and goodness begins to unravel” (215). As such, the seductress of *The London Merchant* personifies unbounded female potency.

In an article entitled “Bourgeois Tragedy or Sentimental Melodrama? The Significance of George Lillo’s *The London Merchant*,” David Wallace broaches the question of the aesthetic and historical significance of Lillo’s text. In particular, Wallace posits that “the Anglo-American reception has remained insensitive to how Lillo’s play by establishing a relationship between a socio-economic ethic and a private morality, provid[ing] the foundation for a new dramatic form: modern naturalist tragedy” (125). As such, *The London Merchant* marks a turning point in the evolution of British drama, the moment in which the loci of the tragic drama moved from the province of the upper class to the middle and working class so to examine the tragic dimensions of the everyday. According to Wallace, this pivotal moment speaks to the “process of generic transformation, whereby the introduction of a distinctively modern ideological and social content becomes incompatible with classical or neo-classical conceptions of tragedy and engenders a new type of tragic drama” (126).

William Gilmore Simms and the Frontiers of *Beauchamp*

It is Wallace’s cogent observations on the transformative nature of genre that ask us to consider the ways in which Simms deploys the sentimental genre in his rendition of the Sharp-Beauchamp tragedy, and particularly his characterization of Ann Cook, in order to problematize sexual, moral, and legal ideologies of the time. Simms’s use of the sentimental as a fictional genre is negligible. His 1850 novella, *Flirtation at the Moultrie House: In a Series of Letters*

from Miss Georgiana Appleby, to her Friends in Georgia showing the Doings at the Moultrie House, and the Events which took place at the Grand Costume Ball, on the 29th August, 1850; with Other Letters, is the only known example that adheres, albeit mildly, to the genre's conventions. Written as a series of epistles, *Flirtation at the Moultrie House* chronicles Miss Georgiana Appleby's summer sojourn to Charleston, South Carolina where she finds herself whisked away into the upper class's world of balls, flirtation, and betrayal as the suave Augustus Colleton woos her—and then her best friend Sophronia Kirkland. As Georgiana's brother, Tom Appleby, recounts to one of his friends back home in Georgia, Charleston, “after all, [is] nothing but a flirtation” (*Flirtation* 17). Lighthearted and satirical in tone, *Flirtation* models itself on the epistolary romances of the time and captures the social life of the leisure class of the antebellum South.

In contrast, Simms's *Charlemont; or the Pride of the Village* (1856) and *Beauchampe; or the Kentucky Tragedy* (1856) invoke the wilds of the interior and exterior landscapes of antebellum frontier spaces. As Simms himself describes in the novel's advertisement, the tale is set in a liminal space, in this new frontier country that is “scattered over a large territory” and where denizens “meeting infrequently, feel the lack of social intercourse; and this lack tends to break down most of the barriers which a strict convention usually establishes for protection” (*Charlemont* 8). The historiography and geography implore the reader to ponder “the social characteristics of the time and region” (*Charlemont* 8). Kentucky offers a unique positionality in the topography of the United States. Located slightly north and west of what is traditionally termed the deep South, Kentucky has historically been considered a border state. Yet its southern roots run deep. Kentucky was one of four slave-owning states that remained neutral during the Civil War, and the richness of its agricultural, hunting, and coal mining industries

along with its borderlands-Appalachian location links Kentucky to a southern history. As Stephen Aron notes in his introduction to *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay*, it is the fifteenth state's transformation from an agricultural sphere to an industrialized site that defines this state's trans-Appalachian heritage. First explored for the allures of its hunting, Kentucky became an early American space that "breached geographical and cultural boundaries between backcountry and Indian country" (Aron 27). As speculators settled in the region, Kentucky proved to be a prime location for economic speculation; by the early nineteenth century, life in the Bluegrass state mirrored that of the Virginia Tidewater region (Aron 124). For Aron and other historians, Kentucky is marked by its dichotomous heritage, exemplified by its two state heroes, Daniel Boone and Henry Clay. It is a place of passion and logic, of brute wildness and thoughtful discrimination. As Simms himself notes, Kentucky itself is marked by "its determined will and a restless instinct" (*Charlemont* 10–11); in essence and form, nineteenth-century Kentucky is a locale of unregulated passion.

Simms's Margaret Cooper, his fictional rendering of the Ann Cook figure, speaks as well to excessive emotion. Although Simms acknowledges that his protagonist is "drawn from the life and with severe regard to the absolute features of the original" (*Charlemont* 11), he also notes that "her character and career will illustrate most of the mistakes which are made by that ambitious class, among the gentler sex, who are now seeking so earnestly to pass out from that province of humiliation to which the sex has been circumscribed from the first moment of recorded history" (*Charlemont* 11). "Her danger," posits Simms, "corresponds with her desires" (*Charlemont* 12). As such, Cooper's story morphs into a cautionary tale regarding transgressive behaviors, one in which unrestrained sensibility will actualize "a perilous fall from pride of

place, and power, when goaded on by an insane ambition, in the extreme development of her mere intellect, she shall forfeit . . . the securities of her sex” (12).

In this way, Catherine E. Kelly’s discussion of women’s lives in light of changing modes of economic production can help explicate the narrative strains of Simms’s text. Kelly’s work on women’s lives of New England, *In the New England Fashion: Reshaping Women’s Lives in the Nineteenth Century*, considers the link between social and historical change and intellectual history. Kelly acknowledges that the transformation of the countryside elucidates “not simply an economic or social process but a cultural and intellectual one as well” (16). Rampant antebellum changes, including those in consumption, distribution, and sociability, had far-reaching ramifications on gender roles and identities (16), and Kelly argues that the consideration of women’s texts, be they fictional or not, can reveal much about the “capitalist transformation of the countryside, the origins of the middle class, and the relation between cultural representation and social practice” (17). Similarly, movement to frontier spaces in response to the Jacksonian call for Manifest Destiny would further complicate the constructs of gender, domesticity, and work in antebellum America.¹⁰⁵ As Kelly aptly notes, the distinction between country spaces and city spaces became tenuous at best as the century progresses, each offering its own opportunities and limitations, and these new untethered landscapes would bespeak a new geography of the mind. New spaces of settlement, conquest, and consolidation would inform

¹⁰⁵ See Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) for a discussion of emerging modes of feminist thoughts vis-à-vis legal and political frameworks in antebellum America.

and alter personal and cultural practices.¹⁰⁶ The fictional construct of Ann Beauchamp embodies this essence, and given Simms's declaration that Margaret Cooper is the "heroine" of this story, one is called upon to pay particular attention to how Simms invokes the multiple renderings of Ann Cook in his adaptation.

From the start of *Charlemont*, Simms makes it clear that this is a story of Kentucky, a land defined by its "dark and bloody ground" (14). Site of a "conquest [that] had fenced in its sterile borders with a wall of fearless men," this locale is where colonization and settlement occurred alongside "slaughter" and "annihilation" (*Charlemont* 14). This is the gothic landscape of the southern frontier: one haunted by the specter of racial subjugation and extinction. In *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation*, Teresa A. Goddu identifies the social, cultural, and political roots of the American gothic as one in which "American gothic literature criticizes America's national myth of new-world innocence by voicing the cultural contradictions that undermine the nation's claim to purity and equality" (12). Acknowledging that Americans have been inculcated to "see the Indian as a gothic monster" (57), Goddu argues that "the Indian is at once a source of the sentimental and the sublime: the nation weeps nostalgically over his disappearance and [rejoices] over the graves that marks his extinction" (57). Recognizing that the frontier is "an intrinsically gothic symbol in American literature," Goddu posits that "the gothic's alliance with the frontier was culturally produced to support a national (literary) identity" (57). Similarly, in their introduction to *Frontier Gothic: Terror and Wonder at the*

Frontier in American Literature, editors David Mogen, Scott Sanders, and Joanne B. Karpinski

¹⁰⁶ For a discussion of the historical, political, and theoretical dimensions of womanhood in the West, see Laura E. Woodworth-Ney, *Women in the American West* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2008); Mary Ann Irwin and James F. Brooks, eds., *Women and Gender in the American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004); Gordon Morris Bakken and Brenda Farrington, eds., *The American West: The Gendered West* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001); Sharon McKern, *Redneck Mothers, Good ol' Girls, and Other Southern Belles: A Celebration of the Women of Dixie* (New York: Viking Press, 1979); and Elizabeth Hayes Turner, *Women and Gender in the New South: 1865–1945* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, 2009).

acknowledge that “at the heart of the indigenous frontier story was the encounter with the wilderness, an encounter which historically was violent, consuming, intrinsically metaphysical, and charged with paradox and emotional ambivalence” (15).¹⁰⁷ For Mogen, Sanders, and Kapinski, “the dark gothic underside of American frontier literature ironically symbolizes the desolation wrought by progress, the psychological deprivation of alienation, and the threatening but revolutionary possibilities that appear when civilized conventions are left behind” (23). Accordingly, “American frontier gothic literature explores frontiers in social, racial, and gender politics as well as, even more fundamentally, frontiers of art and language” (Mogen, Sanders, and Kapinski 26).

Spatially and ideologically, the gothic frontier in Simms’s novels is linked both to the landscape of Kentucky and to the interiority of Margaret Cooper. Wild and unrestrained, the physical dimensions of the land mirror that of Cooper’s mind, which is “moody” and apt to “muse,” as she “follow[s] the route of a brooklet . . . upon its sleepless journey, [which] contributed still more to strengthen the musings of those vagrant fancies that filled the maiden’s thoughts” (*Charlemont* 36). A reader of the classics of English literature, from novels to dramas, Cooper has internalized the narratives she has read, narratives that have “taught her many things, but among these neither wisdom or patience was included;—and one of the worst lessons, which she had learned, and which they had contributed in some respect to teach, was discontent with her condition—a discontent which saddened, if it did not embitter, her present life” (*Charlemont* 28).

¹⁰⁷ For a discussion of the American frontier, see Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978); Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973) to start.

Margaret's embittered present stems from her perceived isolation, an isolation she deems justified by what she discerns as her higher social status and economic class. Haughty and proud, Margaret considers herself distinct from the rustics that surround her. Thus, neighbor William Hinkley's affection for her is unreturned. Instead, it will be the visitor Alfred Stevens, who will glimpse Margaret from afar on his travels west and will search her out on his return east, who will capture Margaret's imagination. Privy to Margaret's inner life, including her innate desire for a larger world, her love of the written word, and "the restless ambition of her foolish heart" (*Charlemont* 79), Stevens will set out to seduce her. Ingratiating himself with the local reverend, Brother Cross, and then apprenticing himself to him, Stevens will secure communal ties in the village of Charlemont. In the vein of a confidence-man, "the young student made himself at home. . . . He had a snug room, entirely to himself, at Squire Hinkley's . . . provided with the best bedding and finest furniture. . . . His wants are anticipated, his slightest suggestion met with the most prompt consideration" (*Charlemont* 110–111). Thus, the novel intimates that the frontier countryside is not immune from the confidence men of the eastern cities. Reverend Joel Hawes, a New England theologian, warns of the duplicitous nature of such men in his 1828 *Lectures Addressed to Young Men*. Hawes admonishes,

Instead of acting in open daylight, pursuing the direct and straightforward path of rectitude and duty, you see men, extensively, putting on false appearances; working in the dark, and carrying their plans by stratagem and deceit. Nothing open, nothing direct and honest; one thing is said, and another thing meant. When you look for a man in one place, you find him in another. With flattering lips and a double heart do they speak. Their language and conduct do not proceed from fixed principle and open-hearted sincerity; but from a spirit of duplicity and management. (69–70)

This social formlessness, the liminality that Karen Halttunen cogently discerns in antebellum

American cities,¹⁰⁸ is evinced in the wilds of the southern border states where duplicity can just as easily beguile and where, perhaps, the formlessness of new social and cultural frameworks easily propagate and perpetuate their existence.

Throughout most of the novel, Stevens's dissembling remains invisible to Margaret. Instead, Margaret perceives Stevens as the embodiment of the romantic heroes of the novels and poems she reads, thereby situating the narrative space of this novel and the frontier landscape of the nation as sites in which the sentimental is seemingly reaffirmed. Yet as Cathy N. Davidson aptly voices regarding the sentimental novel in America, seduction "served as both metaphor and metonymy in summing up the society's contradictory views of women"—the potency of their sexuality and the limitations of their gender (185). Simms's *Charlemont* capitalizes on this with a protagonist who *believes* in her potency wholeheartedly while failing to recognize her inherent weakness. Thus, despite her beauty, strength, and intellect—or, perhaps, because of them—Margaret Cooper aligns ever so explicitly with the female protagonists of late-eighteenth century, standing squarely with Harriot Fawcet, Charlotte Temple, and Eliza Wharton (among others),¹⁰⁹ women victimized by both their passionate natures and the covert chicanery of men. Yet, Margaret is just as equally a victim of a naturalistic universe. Stirred by yearnings for a better life, defined by her beauty and intellect, and caught in a literal and figurative jungle she neither understands nor can negotiate, Margaret's powerlessness in *Charlemont* lies both in her sentimental-fueled imaginings and her passion-ridden ardor, placing her in the realm of the

¹⁰⁸ For a discussion of confidence men in antebellum spaces, see Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

¹⁰⁹ See William Wells Brown, *The Power of Sympathy, or, the Triumph of Nature* (Worcester: Isaiah Thomas and Company, 1789); Susanna Rowson, *Charlotte Temple* (1794. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Hannah Webster Foster, *The Coquette, or, the History of Eliza Wharton* (1797. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

naturalistic heroines of the late nineteenth century.¹¹⁰ In this way, Margaret Cooper deviates, albeit slightly, from the models of femininity David S. Reynolds identifies in his discussion of the archetypal models of American womanhood during the American Renaissance.¹¹¹ Arguing there persists a limited understanding of American femininity, Reynolds limns the diversification of female stereotypes in the antebellum America. Looking to novels, periodicals, and images of American womanhood, Reynolds identifies two distinct modalities: woman as exemplar, as seen in the angelic exemplar, the practical exemplar, and the adventure feminist, and woman as victim, as seen in the working woman, the slave woman, and the fallen woman. Margaret Cooper seems to elide Reynolds's dichotomy as she exists somewhere on the continuum between the adventure feminist and the fallen woman. If anything, Margaret subverts stereotypical female roles, functioning most similarly to how Reynolds describes the women of subversive fiction: "a fallen woman, sympathetically portrayed [and] found to have more power and active virtue than the conventional model exemplar" (Reynolds 364). However, even that definition belies Margaret's essence. As Margaret Cooper herself declares, "I love the dangerous. It seems to lift my soul, to make my heart bound with joy and the wildest delight. I know nothing so delightful as storm and thunder. I look, and see the tall trees shivering and going down with a roar, and I feel that I could sing—sing loud—and believe that there are voices, like mine, then singing through all the tempest. There is no danger here. I have clambered up these ledges repeatedly—up to the very top" (*Charlemont* 189). For Margaret, danger is one's essence.

¹¹⁰ In this way Margaret Cooper foreshadows Stephen Crane's Maggie of *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893), Frank Norris's Trina Sieppe of *McTeague* (1899), and Theodore Dreiser's Carrie Meeber of *Sister Carrie* (1900).

¹¹¹ See David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville*. See chapter twelve, "Types of American Womanhood," pages 345–367 in particular.

Yet, the novel suggests the futility of unbridled passion, for “utter profligacy of the material” and the temporal are meaningless in light of “the more rational . . . and the more moral” (*Charlemont* 294). It is Margaret’s “*egoisme*” as well as her “enthusiasm” that will lead to her fall (*Charlemont* 297). Yet, rhetorically, Simms makes it clear that Margaret’s fate is not solely about actions or beliefs; it is equally about the persuasive power of language and narrative. As the narrator recounts,

Her confidence in herself, in her own strength, and her ignorance of her own passions, were sufficient to render her feelings secure . . . Her mind dwelt only on the divine forms and images of poetry. The ideal world had superseded, not only the dangers, but the very aspect, of the real. Under the magic action of her fancy, she had come to dwell “With those gay creatures of the element / That in the colors of the rainbow live, / And play i’ the plighted clouds”—she had come to speak only in the one language, and of the one topic; and, believing now that she had an auditor equally able to comprehend and willing to sympathize with her cravings, she gave free scope to the utterance of her fancies, and to the headlong impulse of that imagination which had never felt the curb. (*Charlemont* 297)

What seduces Margaret is her internalized concepts of language and the generic modes in which its rhetoric operates. Thus, the “conquest” of Margaret, as described in chapter twenty five, is rooted in the most primal of expressive action: language. Preying on Margaret’s idealized sense of self, Stevens acknowledges her “genius” and “nobility” that elevate her character from those of her neighboring village, and as the narration elucidates, “it was in such artful language as this that the arch-hypocrite flattered and beguiled her” (*Charlemont* 300). Alfred Stevens’s seduction of Margaret is rife with the language *of language*: he notes “the sweet and noble language” of her life, praises the forms of her utterances—be it the ability to “speak,” “hear,” “sing,” and “preach”—and witnesses her abilities as “art”; accordingly, instinctual need informs language and art; it catalyzes “the dumb man [to] find a voice” and voices emerge “in consequences of [one’s] wants” (300–305). For Margaret Cooper and Alfred Stevens, desire fosters language, and, concomitantly, language fosters desire. Human sensibilities, emotions, and frailties are

rooted in systematic concepts of language.

Simms's text intimates that the loss of the self, and, in this case, the loss of the moral self, removes one from the linguistic markers of selfhood. Following her seduction, Margaret can no longer speak. As the narration recounts, "She was now a timid, trembling girl waiting—a dependent . . . waiting for the sign to speak, looking eagerly for the smile to reward her sweetest utterance" (*Charlemont* 308). Additionally, "her song had disdained," and she "uttered her apostrophes" to the lofty void of the heavens (*Charlemont* 308). According to the narration, "hitherto she had been an orator," but now "she was no longer eloquent in words" (*Charlemont* 309). In Simms's *Charlemont*, the expression of female sexuality does not lead to death as it does in *Martin Faber* or other of Simms's border romances; instead, it renders woman voiceless, a potent signifier of woman's legislative and political limitations in antebellum America. Border spaces offer no respite from the restrictive implications of identity politics; in fact, they seemingly perpetuate their repressiveness.

As the novel draws to a close, Margaret becomes cognizant of Stevens's deception, learning he has beguiled the entire town along with herself. His vows to marry her go unfulfilled, and she finds herself abandoned and pregnant with his child. The child will be born stillborn, and the resolution of the novel reverts to a moral-immoral binary, asserting that Margaret's fate is one in which temptation conquers will. As Simms writes,

We are not only to forbear evil; virtue requires that we should be exercised for the purposes of good. She lacked the moral strength which such exercises, constantly pursued, would have assured her. She was a creature of impulse only, not of reflection. Besides, she was ignorant of her particular weaknesses. She was weak where she thought herself strong. This is always the error of a person having a very decided will. The will is constantly mistaken for the power. She could not humble herself, and in her own personal capacities—capacities which had never before been subjected to any ordeal-trial—she relied for the force which was to sustain her in every situation. Fancy a confident country-girl . . . in conflict with the adroit man of the world, and you have the whole history of Margaret Cooper, and the secret of her misfortune. It is in consideration

of this human weakness, that we pray God, nightly, not to suffer us to be exposed to temptation. (*Charlemont* 401)

Simms concludes this reflection with the observation it is “the possession of a quick and powerful mind that naturally enough inspires—that effected her undoing” (*Charlemont* 402). Any proto-feminist leaning in the text is ultimately dismissed as dangerous, and female potency is assuredly negated for when the “woman, through sheer confidence in her own strength, ventures upon the verge of the moral precipice. The very experiment, where the passions are concerned, prove her to be lost” (*Charlemont* 403). As such, Simms ends *Charlemont* as a cautionary tale, one where unrestrained womanhood and devalued domesticity result in personal and societal disorder.

When Simms’s second volume to the Kentucky tragedy, *Beauchampe; or the Kentucky Tragedy*, opens, it is five years later. Margaret Cooper has removed herself and her mother from Charlemont, relocated to a more obscure Kentucky village, and renamed herself Anna Cooke, all in an attempt to efface her past. The Margaret Cooper the reader now encounters is no longer defined by her beauty. In fact, “the fair, white skin had become jaundiced. The fine, dark, expressive eye had assumed a dull, greenish hue, and seemed covered with a filmy glaze. Her frame became singularly attenuated, her limbs feeble; she frequently sunk from exhaustion, and would lie for hours, gasping upon her bed, or upon the dried leaves of the forest, in the shades of which she perpetually sought escape from the sight of human eyes” (*Beauchampe* 28). Now enervated in body and spirit, Margaret relegates herself to the outskirts of the community, confined to a present in which she has effaced the past.

It is when Margaret can face her past, achieved textually by her visiting the spot in Charlemont where Stevens seduced her, that “the past returns to her memory” (*Beauchampe* 31). Able to recognize how the external landscape and her internal landscape both embody her

history, Margaret reflects,

What witnesses, of her wrongs and sufferings, her wild hopes and haughty aims, and their cruel defeat, were all the objects which encompassed her. They were a part of herself. They had taught, informed, encouraged her nature. She had lived in and with them all, and all, in turn, had infused their nature into hers. These rocks had taught her height and hardihood; these waters, depth and contemplation, and the tender nursing of solitary fancies; the woods had lessoned her heart with repose; and the skies, with their eagles ever going upward, had taught her aspiration. (*Beauchampe* 31)

As such, Simms's forest primeval is one that is linked with individual identity. The novel suggests one actualizes personhood through one's interactions within the natural world. The forest of *Beauchampe*, that is, the forest outside of the town of Charlemont, will catalyze much of the novel's plot. Here, Margaret will encounter her former childhood friend, William Hinkley, here he will be struck by "the mournful memories of ruined hopes and lost honors" (*Beauchampe* 38), and here Margaret will fortify her plans for revenge against Stevens. Additionally, it is the only locale in which Margaret will voice her innermost thoughts, invoking poetic verse as the only way to "relieve [her] over-burned brain" (*Beauchampe* 49). Again, language, this time in poetic form, utters the most instinctual: here, a four-stanza poem invoking an existential plea. Margaret cries out, "Where is Death / I call upon the rocks and on the sea / The rocks subside—the waters backward flee / The storm degenerates to the zephyr's breath, / And even the vapors of the swamp deny / Their poison!" (49–50). For Margaret, "Why the bloom. / When naught of flavor's left upon the taste? / Why beauty, when the earth refuses sight, / Leaving all goodliest things to go to waste? / And why not Death when Life's itself a tomb!" (*Beauchampe* 50).

As such, the Margaret Cooper the reader encounters in the second volume is enveloped in a world defined by personal trauma, a trauma that infuses her mind and marks her body. It will be the arrival of Orville Beauchampe, "the second son of a staunch Kentucky farmer" who is

training for the law, that will propel the plot further (*Beauchampe* 49). His family home, where his two sisters and mother reside, adjoins the Cooper residence, and upon seeing Margaret in the forest, as if in a “vision so strange and startling” (*Beauchampe* 50), he is struck by utter curiosity. While his sisters allude to a rumor “that she’s been engaged, and that her lover has played her false, and deserted her” (*Beauchampe* 88), the beatific image of Margaret stirs his imagination and desire. Thinking her lovely and fair, he vows to encounter the woman while in the forest, but his quest to woo her proves to be to no avail.

Beauchampe’s attempted seduction of Margaret will occur again through texts; this time, however, the romancing will not be actualized through the internalized visions of love, romance, and temptation of which Margaret read in *Charlemont* and believed Alfred Stevens and his fictions embodied. Rather, Beauchampe woos the maiden via the physical library she has inherited from her father. When the suitor first tries to visit Margaret, he is denied permission to see her, so he asks Mrs. Cooke to borrow a book, which he then returns in hope of speaking with Margaret. He does this daily until Margaret finally deigns to meet him. Thus, literature, specifically “English books . . . genuine classics of the best days of British literature,” functions as a transactive space, where their physicality, including their marginalia—(“The fine passages were scored marginally with pencil-lines, and an occasional note in the same manner indicated the acquaintance of the commentator with the best standards of criticism” [*Beauchampe* 95])—serve as a revelatory insight into the life of the mind of the reader. For the young lawyer, the world of texts and the life of the mind are just as seductive as the fleeting glimpse of Margaret in the forest. Seduction, suggests Simms, is rooted equally in the mind and in the body.

The rhetorical link across language, law, and love is further elucidated in chapter nine. Beauchampe wishes to pursue his quest for Margaret persistently and passionately. He applies

logical syllogisms to his considerations of her, noting the way he can integrate himself into her life (for him, this will be through offering legal counsel to her mother regarding family property, an offering that, while it allows him frequent entry into her home, does not get him far in his pursuit of Margaret). It is when he renounces his passionate and profession-based practices and acts with prudence and forbearance that he begins to subdue Margaret's disinterest and awaken her sensitivities. As such, Beauchampe purposefully derides the overt machinations associated with his profession and subtly invokes the practices of rhetoric to prove his affection, intimating that human affairs involve the balanced negotiation of the mind and the heart.

If anything, this novel upholds the belief that a tempered sensibility is key to personal and communal equanimity, and the stylistic conventions of *Beauchampe* seemingly mirror that. While *Charlemont* is marked by passionate declarations, rich imagery, and quick-paced staccato conversations, the tone of *Beauchampe* is more staid. The landscapes are less wild and dangerous and more reflective and musing. The conversations are more philosophical and less pointed. While *Charlemont* whirls through a series of locales with multiple minor characters, *Beauchampe* hones in, for the most part, on Margaret and Beauchampe, illuminating how the former is enveloped in her past while the latter attempts to pull her to the future. The tension, if there is any, is internal—Margaret's struggle to come to terms with what happened in Charlemont and Beauchampe's struggle to reconcile his desire for Margaret with a pursuit that might win her. The result is a more sedate, focused novel that seemingly reflects the privileging of logic over passion.

Equally, the novel privileges the use of written texts as means of seduction. When Margaret rebuffs his advance, Beauchampe "resorts to that process of pen, ink, and paper," and, with an allusion to Pope's "The Epistle of Heloise to Abeillard," the same text referenced in

Letters of Ann Cook, the young suitor's "soul poured itself forth upon his sheet with all the burning effluence of the most untameable affection" (*Beauchampe* 127). Linking affect with the act of writing, Beauchampe literally weeps onto the paper, the somatic representation of the enthusiastic effusions of his soul. As such, Simms establishes the character of Margaret as the passive recipient of Beauchampe's active pursuit of her, a reversal of what Ann Cook's own writings intimate.

When Beauchampe finally is able to convince Margaret to speak of her past, Margaret's story of dishonor will come in the form of a confession, an apologia that roots the blame with Stevens. Hesitant to give her love to Beauchampe, Margaret cautions that "she demands something more than a confidence like this: [her] husband must avenge [her] dishonor" (*Beauchampe* 141), to which Beauchampe will respond, "I am already sworn to it. The moment which revealed your wrong, bound me as your avenger" (*Beauchampe* 141). In a telling moment, Margaret speaks of the fates, which she sees guiding her life, and to the exigencies, which compel her story. Margaret affirms, "I almost feel that there is a divine, at least a fated compulsion, in the mood which now prompts me to tell all. I feel it pressing upon me like a duty. It is like that Fate which coerced the ancient mariner into the report of his marvelous progress, and compelled the listener to hear. It must be told; and you, Beauchampe, can not help but hear. A power beyond mine own has willed it, and therefore you are here now. It chains us both" (*Beauchampe* 143–144). As Margaret reveals the entirety of her dishonor, Beauchampe sits entranced, and in a compelling allusion, Simms likens Margaret to the magical Prospero of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610), one who can utilize language to wield a world of power.

Embedded in the Sharp-Beauchampe saga is the articulation of an aristocratic masculine

identity, particularly the construction and deployment of honor. As Julian Pitt-Rivers describes, “Honour is the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his *claim* to pride, but it is also the acknowledgement of that claim, his excellence recognized by society, his *right* to pride” (21). Central to the nineteenth-century behavior codes of Kentucky was the behavior accorded to masculine honor. As Daniel Aron notes, “the importance Bluegrass planters attached to matters of honor went beyond the attentive standard set by English nobleman” (127). Yet honor codes were equally about the codification of violence, a performance of honor in a rational attempt to subdue emotional and ideological disjointedness. As Bertram Wyatt-Brown acknowledges in *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, legal judgments condoned the “principles of [this] traditional ethic” (305). Wyatt-Brown notes that “courts and lawmakers never put honor into statutory or judicial form because it was commonly understood that there should be a division between the workings of the law and the stalwart defense of man’s sense of self” (305). In fact, legal decisions in capital crimes tended to uphold the principles of manhood and of honor. In speaking of the Beauchamp case, Wyatt-Brown asseverates that Beauchamp’s actions (as well as sentiments) “did not merely express the romance of nineteenth-century love, but reflected a much more ancient, primordial code of male possessiveness that was still very much alive” (307). Accordingly, “the language in which these primitive ideals were couched posed the eternal dichotomies of right and wrong, innocence and evil, honesty and deception, without the slightest hint of ambiguity or introspection” (Wyatt-Brown 307). To take the law into one’s hand was a justifiable expression of one’s lost honor.

Simms’s *Beauchampe* complicates the archetypical tale of the ritualized performance of southern manhood in multiple ways. First, Alfred Stevens is reinserted into the plotline, this

time under his true identity, W. P. Sharpe, the attorney under whom Beauchampe trained. This revelation is revealed as Margaret reads aloud a letter to her husband from his mentor. Upon finishing the letter, “its contents struck her strangely,” and she ponders that “it had something in its tone like that of one whom she had been accustomed to hear. The contents of it were nothing. The meaning was obvious enough. Of the parties she knew nothing. But there was the *sentiment* of the writer, which, like the key-note in music, pervaded the performance—not necessarily a part of its material, yet giving a character of its own to the whole” (*Beauchampe* 166–167). Here, the aesthetic dimensions of the text reveal the emotional life of the writer, marking sentiment as a tangible product of textual construction. Second, William Hinkley, Margaret’s one-time Charlemont counterpart, will discover the rightful identity of Alfred Stevens while in Frankfort and seek to duel him in requite for the dishonoring of Margaret Cooper,¹¹² and third, Margaret will find herself blissfully in love with Beauchampe, so much so that “her feelings had once more been humanized—perhaps we should say *womanized*—” for “*not* to meet Stevens now was her prayer” (*Beauchampe* 224). Now able to regulate her hatred, she “learn[ed] to forget and forgive . . . and learned to forego the early dreams with which her ambitious mind commenced in progress” (*Beauchampe* 224). An immersion into the domestic affords the regulation of passion and a continuance of societal norms.

The arrival of Colonel Sharpe at her doorstep to visit her husband will make Margaret the one forced to dissemble. Again, language figures a site of manipulation, with Sharpe subtly alluding to his former relationship with Margaret. In a conversation with Beauchampe, Sharp

¹¹² It should be noted that William Hinkley also has a name change in *Beauchampe*. In the second text, he goes by the name of William Calvert, having taken on the surname of his adoptive uncle. Calvert’s own legal studies find him in Frankfort, Kentucky where he re-encounters Stevens/now-Sharpe. While the shifting names in the second novel are more closely aligned to the real-life protagonists of the Sharp-Beauchamp tragedy, they undoubtedly speak, on a micro-level, to the shifting identities in the novel proper and, on a macro-level, to shifting identities and resultant instabilities in antebellum America.

states “Seriously, my dear boy, I have never been more pleasantly surprised than in meeting your wife. Really, she is remarkably beautiful; and though she is evidently shy of strangers, yet as you know I have the art of bringing women out, I may boast of my ability to say what stuff she is made of. She speaks with singular force and elegance. I have never met with equal eloquence in any woman but one” (*Beauchampe* 250). When asked to identify that woman, Sharpe retorts, “Nay, I can not tell you *that*. It is years since I knew her, and she is no longer the same being: but your wife reminds very much reminds me of her” (*Beauchampe* 250).

As the novel continues, Margaret finds herself continually victimized by Sharpe, albeit this time by his verbal machinations. He professes his undying love for her, notes that Beauchampe could never match her intellectual prowess, and reminds her of their own blissful romance. In the battle of rhetoric, Sharpe wins out: the length of his diatribes exceeds hers by far. Once again, he invokes the language of romance to seduce her, opining “those moments were too precious to me to be forgotten; the memory of those joys too dear. Bitter was the grief I felt when I was compelled to fly from a region in which I had taught, and been learned myself, the first true mysteries which I had ever known of love” (*Beauchampe* 262). He pleads, “Margaret, I can not think that you did not love me still. It is impossible that you should have forgotten what we both once knew of rapture in those dear moments at Charlemont. And having loved me then—having given to me the first youthful emotions of your bosom—you surely can not love this Beauchampe” (*Beauchampe* 262). If the masculine code of honor demands a battle of wits and will via physical prowess, a battle with a woman requires the rhetoric of the sentimental and the demand for a kiss—a kiss that Beauchampe notes “will be all the sweeter now” (*Beauchampe* 263). When Margaret reminds him to remember his own wife and child, Sharpe dismisses her rejoinder and moves forward to kiss her. When Margaret moves forward to

grab a weapon, Sharpe verbally disarms her. When she vows to tell her husband of Sharpe's alter identity, Sharpe reminds her that his prowess as an attorney will render her story futile. In this orchestrated dance of seduction and dismissal, of power and powerlessness, the masculine outduels the feminine.

Margaret's confession to Beauchampe regarding Sharpe's true identity again speaks to the limitations of language. Despite being of "strong mind and a will that no pain of body and pang of soul come overcome," Margaret's rendering of the tale agonizes the listener (*Beauchampe* 291). Unable to reconcile what he has believed with what he now knows, Beauchampe experiences "utter recoil and shrinking of soul when he heard it" (*Beauchampe* 291). As the narration describes, "there is a point to which human passion sometimes arrives when all language fails of description; as in a condition of physical suffering, the intensity of pain is providentially relieved by utter unconsciousness and stupor" (*Beauchampe* 291). Here it is made clear that language itself is liminal.

When confronted by Beauchampe, Sharpe refuses to act with the prescribed codes of honor: he refuses to duel Beauchampe, he asserts that Margaret seduced him, and he claims that the child she said was his was actually another's, all of which causes Beauchampe to grab the dagger he has in hand and avenge his wife's honor, and "a single blow" slays Sharpe (*Beauchampe* 334). Clearly diverging from the original source, this fictional murder is not a nighttime surreptitious attack but an unpremeditated attack by daytime, proving that passion does not ascribe to narrative conventions. As the narrator muses,

a murder in a novel, though of very common occurrence, is usually a matter of a thousand very thrilling minutiae. In the hands of a score of our modern romancers, it is surprising what capital they make of it! How it runs through a score of chapters!—admits of a variety of details, descriptions, commentaries, and conjectures! Take any of the great *raconteurs* of the European world—not forgetting Dumas and Reynolds—and see what they will do with it! How they turn it over, and twist it about, as a sweet morsel under the

tongue! In either of these hands, it becomes one of the most prolific sources of interest; which does not end with the knife or bludgeon stroke, or bullet shot, but multiplies its relations the more it is conned, and will swallow up half the pages of an ordinary duodecimo. (*Beauchampe* 335).

In *Beauchampe*, Simms destabilizes the genre's conventions with one solid shot to Sharpe—and to narrative expectations.

Simms equally curtails the story of *Beauchampe*'s capture and imprisonment, or, as the narrator says, "We could tell a long story about the manner in which *Beauchampe* was captured; but it will suffice to say that when the pursuers presented themselves at his threshold, he was ready, and with the high, confident spirit of one assured that all was right in his own bosom, he yielded himself up at their summons, and attended them to Frankfort" (*Beauchampe* 344). In the circumscribed space of the prison-house, language perhaps offers *Beauchampe* some means of escape. As his wife reminds him, his story, when told, will free him. She confidently asserts, "Do not fear, my husband . . . I know that they must acquit you. No jury of men—men who have wives, and daughters, and sisters, but must not only acquit you of crime, but must justify and applaud you for the performance of a deed which protects their innocence, and strikes terror into the heart of the seducer" (*Beauchampe* 346). *Beauchampe*'s actions have spoken for a generation of women denied equal protection under the law. Margaret continues, noting "you have not been my champion merely, you are the champion of my sex. The blow which your arm has struck, was a blow in behalf of every unprotected female, of every poor orphan—fatherless, brotherless, and undefended—who otherwise would be the prey of the ruffian and the betrayer" (*Beauchampe* 346). Within his and Margaret's story is the story of a history of female subjugation.

In a perversion of justice, the trial perpetuates a legacy of financial and political power for "perjury was an easily-bought commodity upon his trial" (*Beauchampe* 378). Witnesses

“swear to his footsteps, to his voice, his face, his words, his knife and clothes,” and although “the knife which struck the blow was buried in the earth [and] the clothes which he wore were sunk in the river, a knife was produced on trial as that which has pierced the heart of his victim; and witnesses identified him in garments which he no longer possessed” (*Beauchampe* 378). As such, Beauchampe’s fate is sealed.

For Beauchampe, his fate has proven both the powers and limitations of man’s interiority. As the prisoner recounts, “What matters it by what name we seek to establish a distinction between the sentiments and passions? In those dreadful extremes of situation, from which our feeble nature recoils, all passions and sentiments run into one. We love!” (*Beauchampe* 391). It is, he goes on to expostulate, “not our love that fails us, in the hour of physical and mental torment. It is our strength. Thought and principle, truth and purity, are poor defences, when the frame is agonized with a torture beyond what nature was intended to endure. Then the strongest man deserts his faith and disavows his principles. Then the purest becomes profligate, and the truest dilates in falsehood. It is madness, not the man, that speaks” (*Beauchampe* 391). Man remains victim to his mind.

In the philosophical discourse that follows, Margaret Cooper considers man’s relationship to God, positing that it is man who has initiated a naturalistic universe where only the strong survive. Asserting God’s beneficence, Margaret theorizes, “It is the brutal imagination that ascribes to God a delight in brutal punishments. Nowhere do we see in nature such a feeling manifested. Life is everywhere a thing of beauty. Smiles are in heaven, sweetness on earth, the winds bring it, the airs breathe it, stars smile it, blossoms store and diffuse it” (*Beauchampe* 392). It is, according to Margaret, mankind alone that “defaces and destroys, usurps, vitiates, and overthrows” (*Beauchampe* 392). Simms’s version of the Sharp-Beauchamp

story proves the utter omnipotence *and* weakness of man.

The novel's resolution offers one final assertion of man's power, specifically Margaret Cooper's desire to control her and her husband's destiny. For Margaret, this is her final "utterance," a chance to proclaim her own power. As she herself states, "Such . . . will be that brief period of transition, when, passing from the dim, deceptive starlight of this life, we enter into the perfect day. That will be momentarily dark, perhaps. It must be. There may be a state of childhood—an imperfect consciousness of the things around us—of our own wants—and among these, possibly, a lack of utterance. Strange, indeed, that the inevitable should still be the inscrutable!" (*Beauchampe* 396) To utter—and to act—are parallel actions in Margaret's mind. Our language denotes our essence as do our actions. To be human is to act and to speak.

For Margaret, the final act of her own autonomy will be to attempt to kill herself and her husband, and as the original Ann Cook's story proved, man's limitations affirm themselves even there. As in the 1825 Kentucky tragedy, Margaret's attempts to claim her and her husband's lives fail when he is only wounded by the what-was-to-have-been-fatal wound. Yet perhaps this is an adequate end to Margaret's story, for it is the sole moment in the narrative where she ostensibly controls her fate, and yet, ironically, she still falls victim to her limitations. When Beauchamp's body is removed from the gallows, the narration muses, "Earth and its little life were no more" (*Beauchampe* 400), denoting the insignificance of man within a seemingly naturalistic universe. The final image of the novel returns to William Hinkley, Margaret's neighbor from Charlemont who long held unrequited feelings for her. In this way, the narrative circles back to the landscape with which it began—a landscape where mankind seeks to assert his desires yet is always irrevocably reminded of what he can never possess.

In a review of Alexander B. Meek's oration to the Phi Kappa and Demosthenean

Societies at the University of Georgia at Athens in 1844, William Gilmore Simms proclaims that Meek's title "Americanism in Literature" was an apt one. Speaking to the need for an American literature, Simms notes "American Literature seems to be a thing, certainly—but it is not a thing exactly" (*Views* 2). Despite acknowledging that American writers are "numerous," Simms criticizes the fact that "with very few exceptions, their writings might as well be European. . . . They think after European models, draw their stimulus and provocations from European books, fashion themselves in European tastes, and look chiefly to the awards of European criticism" (*Views* 2). In this way, American literature "denationalizes the American mind" (*Views* 2). Calling for less imitation and more originality, Simms implores his readers to "make our literature what we please" (*Views* 19). Acknowledging that the geographical, political, and intellectual spaces of America diverge from European models in both form and in thought, Simms writes,

the very divergencies of our paths are favourable to the boldness, the freedom and the flights of the national intellect. We make our own paths—we trace out our own progress—and, just in due degree as we turn aside from the dictation of those great cities, which, among us, are more immediately allied with the marts of Europe, so do we discover marks of the most certain freshness and originality, though coupled with rudeness and irregularity—a harshness which offends and a wildness which, we are encouraged to believe, it is not beyond the power of time and training to subdue to equable and noble exercises. To any one who looks into the character of our people,—who passes below the surface, and sees in what way the great popular heart beats in the several States of the confederacy,—with what calm, consistent resolve in some—with what impatient heat in others—how cold but how clear in this region,—how fiery, but how clouded in that;—there will be ample promise for the future, not only in the value of the material, but in its exquisite and rich variety. And, even on the surface, how these varieties speak out for themselves, so that it shall not be difficult for a shrewd observer of men to distinguish at a glance, and to declare from what quarter of America the stranger comes,—whether from the banks of the Charles or the Hudson, the Savannah or the Mississippi. (*Views* 18)

For Simms's rendering of the Sharp-Beauchamp tragedy, the interior frontier spaces of the nation embody a wildness apart from the citified spaces of the East, a fertile space where "freshness and

originally” stand alongside “rudeness and irregularity.” Bare ground exists across the nation—from Boston, to New York, to Savannah to New Orleans—all fostering ample spaces for an American story, spaces—and stories—that speak to the passions and restraints of American life.

For Simms, the sentimental novel is one place in which these tensions can be negotiated, yet Simms’s deployment of the genre proffers a complicated exploration of antebellum interior and exterior life. As Cathy N. Davidson notes in her discussion of the sentimental fiction, “the early sentimental novel cannot be reduced, then, to the simple formula that contemporary readers and critics commonly ascribe to it. . . . [M]any of these novels question the efficacy of the prevailing legal, political, and social values” (220), and clearly Simms’s *Charlemont; or, The Pride of the Village* and *Beauchampe; or, the Kentucky Tragedy* do just that. In *Revolution and the Word*, Davidson queries, “What can we make of fallen women who are more the victims of circumstances than the embodiment of sin and who scarcely deserve the punishments that are heaped on them? Of seducers who are not villains . . . or the seducer, proud of his conquests but contemptuous of the women he seduces, often inversely mirrors the values of the moralist?” (220–221). In reply, Simms’s rendition of the Kentucky tragedy might retort that while “virtue (writ large) does not always save the heroine,”¹¹³ it is man—and woman’s—innate biological yearnings coupled with an internalized concept of honor that propels the tragedy inherent to the sentimental. Additionally, it is man’s reliance of the conventions of language, literature, rhetoric, and the law that serves to negate his own ability to assert his autonomy. For Simms, the wild, whether in nature or in humankind, is too strong a foe to discomfit, and the cultural practices of the old South only further man’s descent into the wilds of the mind.

¹¹³ Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*, 221.

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